BAR S2740 2015 ARBACH & SCHIETTECATTE (Eds) PRE-ISLAMIC SOUTH ARABIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURS Archaeopress

ISBN 978-1-4073-1399-3
9 781407 313993

British Foundation for the Study of Arabia Monographs No. 16

Series editors: D. Kennet & St J. Simpson

Pre-Islamic South Arabia and its Neighbours: New Developments of Research

Edited by

Mounir Arbach
Jérémie Schiettecatte



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BAR International Series 2740
2015

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المؤسسة البريطانية لدراسة الجزيرة العربية

BAR International Series 2740

2015

Published by

Archaeopress
Publishers of British Archaeological Reports
Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED
England
info@archaeopress.com
www.archaeopress.com

BAR S2740
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Cover illustration credit: Inscription of ʿAmdān Bayin Yuhaqbiḍ and ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate
(AFSM archive, M. Maraqten)

ISBN 978 1 4073 1399 3

Printed in England by Digipress, Didcot

All BAR titles are available from:

Hadrian Books Ltd
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OX2 7BP
England

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I. French & English section

Depuis leur création en 1997, les Rencontres Sabéennes ont vocation à réunir annuellement les spécialistes de l'Arabie méridionale préislamique et des régions voisines, archéologues et épigraphistes, afin de présenter l'avancée des recherches récentes dans la discipline.
Chaque année, un thème privilégié est proposé sur lequel les participants sont invités à se pencher. À l'occasion des 17e Rencontres sabéennes, qui se sont tenues à Paris les 6, 7 et 8 juin 2013, ce thème fut « La religion dans l'Arabie préislamique : territoires du sacré et espaces sacrés ».
Au moment où la situation ne permet plus de conduire de travaux de terrain en Arabie du Sud et où la communauté scientifique se consacre à la synthèse d'un corpus épigraphique et archéologique abondant, les religions arabiques préislamiques apparaissent comme l'une des clés de compréhension de ces sociétés et comme un élément-clé dans la définition des identités locales.
Ce thème était motivé par une question principale : dans quelle mesure les cultes et pratiques religieuses structurent-ils le paysage et la société de l'Arabie préislamique ? Cette question se déclinait autour de plusieurs registres : origine des panthéons arabiques ; lien entre forme architecturale, divinité et entité territoriale ; rôle du pèlerinage dans la définition des identités ; extension géographique des cultes voués aux différentes divinités de l'Arabie préislamique ; conséquences de l'émergence des pratiques monothéistes sur les temples païens ; ruptures et continuités entre pratiques préislamiques et islamiques.
Dans ce volume, outre les chapitres qui portent sur ces questions, plusieurs contributions sont consacrées à l'actualité de la recherche en Arabie méridionale et sur son pourtour. C'est ici l'occasion pour plusieurs spécialistes yéménites qui continuent à œuvrer sur le terrain de présenter les résultats de travaux inédits. En dépit des circonstances difficiles, nous ne pouvons que saluer leur ténacité dans la poursuite de leurs activités de recherche.
Nous tenons enfin à remercier l'ensemble des institutions qui, par leur soutien financier, ont permis la tenue et la publication des 17e Rencontres Sabéennes : l'UMR8167 Orient et Méditerranée (CNRS, Université Paris 1, Université Paris Sorbonne, EPHE) ; l'UMR7041 Archéologie et Sciences de l'Antiquité (CNRS, Université Paris 1, Université Paris Ouest) ; le programme Coranica [ANR-10-FRAL-018-01] de l'Agence Nationale de la Recherche et de la Deutsche ForschungsGemeinschaft ; le Labex Resmed [ANR-10-LABX-72] ; le Labex DynamiTe [ANR-11-LABX-0046] ; l'Université Paris-Sorbonne ; le CEFAS et le ministère des Affaires étrangères français.
Nous remercions enfin MM. Derek Kennet et St John Simpson d'avoir accepté la publication de cet ouvrage dans la série des monographies de la *British Foundation for the Study of Arabia* des *British Archaeological Reports*.

À Paris, le 26 mai 2015
Jérémie Schiettecatte & Mounir Arbach

Sacred spaces in ancient Yemen – The Awām Temple, Ma'rib: A case study

Mohammed Maraqten

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to outline and draw attention to some concepts of sacred spaces in ancient Yemen, using as an example the Awām temple near Ma'rib, Yemen. The Awām temple is unique since it is possibly the best-preserved temple in pre-Islamic Arabia. It has extraordinary oval plan and its architectural decoration is extremely rich. The Awām temple's role as a social institution dedicated to the Sabaean god Almaqah, reflecting the spirit and relations between human and the god, is well documented in the inscriptions discovered in this temple.

Furthermore, this study tasks to present not only the architectural expressions of sacred space at the Awām temple, but also to present the social and cultic practices in this temple and to study the sacred concepts in the light of interrelations with the various ancient Near Eastern cultures.

Introduction

The nine seasons of excavations (1998–2006) carried out by the American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM) in the Awām complex, yielded not only hitherto unknown architectural components such as the Peristyle Hall, Area A, and others, but, perhaps more importantly, the more than 500 inscriptions that have shed new light on religious practice in the temple and surrounding area. At present, there are ca. 800 inscriptions in total. This corpus now forms the largest and most important archive of ancient Yemen.

This material allows us to extrapolate about how codes were specified and used in ritual activities, which took place in various parts of the temple. [1] The new data informs us not only about the cultural history of Yemen, but also specifically about the religious activities at the Awām temple (Glanzman 1998, 1999; Zaid & Maraqten 2008). It also makes it possible to study the function of this temple during its existence (Maraqten 2002: 209–216). [2]

The vast, oval-shaped temple, now called by its modern name, Maḥram Bilqīs, was constructed by the Sabaeans at the edge of what is now a desert (Fig. 1). It was made about the time of the emergence of Sabaean culture, around the beginning of the first millennium BCE. The temple continued to operate up to the end of the 4th century CE. It was the main centre of worship for the Sabaean national deity Almaqah, and hence doubtless the key focus of the concepts of sacred space and sacred time in ancient Yemen.

A typology of temples in the ancient Near East was drawn up by Lundquist (1983: 205–218) who compiled a list of nineteen features shared by temples in the general area. Temple complexes in ancient Yemen demonstrate many of these characteristics, a fact that makes it worthwhile to study them in relationship to other known religious monuments. Meanwhile, there is an urgent need to achieve a new evaluation of the available epigraphic and archaeological sources relating to South Arabian temples and to carry out an interdisciplinary study in the light of comparative religion. [3]

Some concepts of sacred space related to the Awām temple discussed in this paper can be summarized as follows:

- Terminology of sacred space and temple;
- Manifestations of the sacred: The Awām temple as a locus of Almaqah's power;
- The Awām temple as a place of communication between the god and the people;
- The Awām temple as an icon of the Sabaean kingdom;
- Architectural expressions of sacred space at the Awām temple;
- Access to the Awām temple: The layout of cultic areas and ritual organization.

Terminology for sacred spaces and the temple

Sacred space

A sacred space can be defined as a place, which enhances communication between the human and the divine. The essential notion of a space that becomes sacred is "a space set apart". [4]

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[1] I am grateful to Mrs Merilyn Phillips Hodgson, president of the AFSM, who directed the excavations at Awām. It was her determined efforts that made the rediscovery of this temple possible. Credits for the Illustrations: AFSM archive.

[2] The author of this study joined the AFSM team as epigrapher and was present during all the excavation seasons.

[3] See Boda & Novotny 2010; George 1993; Palmer 2012 and Ragavan 2013: 1–16.

[4] The concept of sacred space is aptly demonstrated in the Bible, where God commands Moses: "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3/5).



Fig. 1. General view of the Awām Temple (AFSM archive).

Sacred spaces have been divided into two categories — natural settings such as the sky, mountains, trees, etc., and settings which human beings have arranged or constructed — cultic stones and temples, for example. However, the definition can be ambiguous since it is a multi-layered concept and encompasses a diversity of components, all of which are concerned in the essential ideology and mythology of the temple. [5]

Arabian sacred space is based on the concept of *ḥaram*, "prohibited, sacred, sanctuary"; *ḥawṭa*, "sacred enclave"; *maḥjar*, "interdicted place", and *ḥimā*, "protected enclave, sanctuary" (Serjeant 2005 VI: 3776–3778; Gawlikowski 1982: 301–303).

While *ḥimā* is more specific to central and North Arabia and relates to a protected area for the worshipping of natural forms such as stone altars, trees and so forth, the *ḥaram* in South Arabia has a sacred building in its centre. In secular terms, *ḥimā* might mean the stronghold of a tribe declared by a tribal leader, where animals and vegetation were protected and had the right of asylum (al-Ālūsī III: 31–36). At the same time, *ḥimā* existed as a communal pasture-ground around a village or town and could be construed as a sacred tract, protected from violation by fear of God rather than by any civil authority (Serjeant 2005 VI: 3776–3778). *Ḥimā* also designates graves as sacred spaces (Wellhausen 1897: 106): [6] South Arabian graves and grave steles composed a sacred enclave; those who violated the area had to reckon with the god ʿAthtar (see *CIH* 441–444, Maraqten 1998: 188–196).

It appears that the South Arabian concept of the sacred was focused on the *hgr* "town, city". This area was usually, but not necessarily, fortified, with a tutelary deity, such as Aranyadaʿ (*ʾrnydʿ*) of Nashshān. A Sabaic inscription describes Maʾrib and Ṣanʿāʾ as *mḥrm* (Ja 577/17, Beeston 1983: 36–38). The concept of *hgr*-sacred territory continued in Yemen and is still used today; for example note the term *hijra* — "protected area" —, as proposed by R.B. Serjeant (2005 VI: 3777, Dresch 1989: 103–151).

Outside the city walls stretched the fields, domains, pasturelands (*ʾkl*, *ḏwwdt*, *mrʿyt*) and unfortified villages. Various terms such as *ḫlf*, "region, vicinity of a town", *bḍʿ* (pl. *ʾbḍʿ*), "tributary territory of a town", [7] *mḥgr*, "land reserved for s.o.", [8] and *ʾrḍ*, "land" were applied to *hgr*-sacred territory in the inscriptions. Evidently, the *hgr*-sacred territory was secured by boundary stones as in the case of the town called Nashq (*RÉS* 2868, cf. also *RÉS* 3945/15).

The Arabic term *maḥjar* is used in Arabic sources to refer to Yemen. *Maḥjar* is described as "The tract surrounding a town or village". Hence "the *maḥāǧir* of the kings (*ʾaqyāl*) of El-Yemen, were places of pasturage, each king having one for his exclusive use: The *maḥǧar* of a *qayl* of El-Yemen was his tract of land into which no other person than himself entered" (Lane II: 518; al-Selwī 1987: 67 f.). [9]

Beyond the *hgr*, "town, city", and the *hgr*-sacred territory was open land (*br barr*, *bdt*, *bādiya*), mountains and desert. Passages from walled cities to fields were strategically weak, so as a result they were protected by specific gods, and became the reason for the construction of monumental city gates.

All these spaces, the town (*hgr*), the *hgr*-sacred territory, and the open land around them, could contain temples. The basic notion of the sacred space of a temple complex indicates a territory or a defined space that was separated from any profane practice, and was set aside solely for communication between human and divinity. This space was surrounded by a wall or cultic stones (*ʾwṯn*, *ʾnṣb*) that proclaimed its sanctity. [10]

The early form of such a temple was an open space containing an altar. Such a sacred space belonged to a specific divinity and a religious structure could be built in the middle around the altar (*mḥrm*, *byt*). [11] Temples in the ancient Near East are typically constructed in consecrated places set apart from other buildings (Lundquist 1983: 205 f.).

The temple

The two most common terms for temple in ancient Yemen are *mḥrm*/*ḥrm*, "precinct, protected area, sacred household", and *byt*, "house, residence". [12] This noun

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5 On the definition of sacred space, see Brereton 2005 XII: 7978–7986; Wightman 2007: 929–938 and Palmer 2012: 20–24.

6 There is also evidence for the sanctity of graves among the Nabataeans, see Alpass 2013: 96 ff.

7 The territory of a town and its patron deity could be fixed by a king or other ruler, for instance see *w-ywm hṯb yṯʿʾmr ʾbḍʿ ʾrnydʿ w-ns*^{2}*n* "and when Yathaʿʾamar fixed the territories of Aranyadaʿ and Nashshān" (AO 31929/3).

8 Beeston *et al.* 1982: 27, 60, 67.

9 It is worthwhile to note that the name of the Nabataean city Hegrāʾ (*ḥgrʾ*) derives from the root ḤGR and may be translated as "protected place".

10 On *wṯn* and *ṣnm* in pre-Islamic Arabia, see Scagliarini 2007: 253–262.

11 For instance Karibʾīl Watar records *w-k-ḏ* / *ybny* / *s*^{1}*mhyfʿ* / *w-ns*^{2}*n* / *byt* / *ʾlmqh* / *b-ws*^{1}*ṭ* / *hgrn* / *ns*^{2}*n*, "and obliged Sumhuyafaʿ and Nashshān to construct the temple of Almaqah in the center of the city of Nashshān" (*RÉS* 3945/16).

12 The common term for temple in Minaic is *byt* (Arbach 1993: 31); cf. also Sabaic *mkrb*, "shrine, temple; synagogue" (Beeston *et al.* 1982: 78).

derives from the Semitic root ḤRM, "to separate, set aside as sacred, declare sacred, consecrate". This root has a broad meaning: "be forbidden, prohibit, abandon, [render] impure" (Leslau 1991: 242; Beeston *et al.* 1982: 70 f.; Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995: 404 f.).[13]

The main concept of sacred space is expressed in pre-Islamic Arabia as *ḥaram*, *ḥimā*, *maḥjar*, and *ḥawṭa* and could contain a religious structure. It should be noted that *ḥaram* occurs as synonym of *ḥimā* in central and North Arabia and that *mḥrm*/*ḥrm*, in the meaning of sacred space or sanctuary, occurs only in Arabia proper, namely in the southern, central and northern areas, and in particular in the Nabataean territories (*mḥrmt*, Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995: 615; Alpass 2013: 139). A further North-Arabic term for sacred space seems to have been *ḥgb*, "shrine, enclosure", which derives from the Arabic *ḥağaba*, "to protect", (cf. also Arabic *ḥiğāb*, "veil, amulet"), which is attested in Palmyra (Hillers & Cussini 1996: 363; Gawlikowski 1982: 302; Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995: 348).[14] Furthermore, *mshkn* means "shrine" in Hatra (Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995: 702). The term *dyr*, "building with religious function (enclosure)" is attested in Palmyrene and Hatra inscriptions (Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995: 247). The term *dyr*, "enclosure, temple complex" is used to describe the Bēl Temple in Palmyra, and in Hatra it stands for the temple complex (Gawlikowski 1982: 301 f.).

The terms as applied to the Awām temple

MḤRM/BYT: In addition to the general terms *mḥrmn* and *byt*, found in the inscriptions in the Awām temple,[15] we have others that designate specific sacred places inside or outside the temple. Both the terms *mḥrm* and *byt* enforce the idea that the Awām temple was a sacred space. The Awām temple is frequently called *mḥrmn* or *mḥrmn ḏ-ʾwm*:[16] It is also known as *byt ʾlmqh*, "House of Almaqah" (*CIH* 957 = MB 2001 I-16),[17] a fact sufficient to impart sacred status to this temple. The ḥaram of Mecca is called al-Bayt al-Ḥarām, "the sacred house", in the Qurʾān (5:2) and was thus referred to as Bayt Allāh al-Ḥarām. The term *byt*, "house", is the common word for temple in the ancient Near East. The name of the temple itself, *ʾwm*, which means "place of refuge, asylum," is further evidence for its sanctity.[18]

The term *maḥram*/*mḥrm* is widely accepted in pre-Islamic Arabia and means the entire sacral area, viz., the temple and its enclave. At the Awām temple the term *mḥrm* is used to designate the entire Awām temple complex, the *temenos* of Awām as well as the cemetery (*mḥrm gnztn*).

There are also several architectural terms mentioned in the inscriptions to designate specific architectural elements or structures but it is still difficult to define them accurately. A brief discussion of some of these terms is as follows:

GWBN: The term *gwbn* derives from the root GWB, "to respond" and in Beeston *et al.* 1982: 51; it is understood as "part of temple structure". Apparently, *gwbn* signifies a specific sacred place inside the Awām temple, possibly the sanctuary of the Oracle where Almaqah responded to his worshippers, or even the chapel for incubation, where worshippers spent the night waiting for an oracular response. We do have information about the construction of the *gwbn* in the Awām temple: king Karibʾīl Watar Yuhanʿim (ca. 45–60 CE) stated that "He erected the complete work of the oracle shrine for Almaqah" (*CIH* 373: … *hḥdṯy tlt nkl gwbn l-ʾlmqh*…). It is possible that this building was inside the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. *Gwbn* appears several times in the Awām inscriptions (*CIH* 373, MB 1998-10, ZI 11).[19] *Gwbn* is also attested in Minaic inscriptions from the Nakraḥ temple in Barāqish, cf. *b-ms¹ʾl b-gwbn*, "by an oracle in Gawbān" (Y.92.B.A.29; see also Y.92.B.A.54., De Maigret & Robin 1993: 469, 489). The term *gwbn* is also mentioned in a Minaic inscription from Darb aṣ-Ṣabī (MAFRAY-Darb aṣ-Ṣabī 1, 5, 16, 26, Robin *et al.* 1981: 249–261).[20]

ḤṬB: A recently discovered fragmentary inscription from the Awām Temple shows *ḥṭb* written in the dual form. The passage reads: *b-ḥṭby* / *ʾlmqh* / *b-ʾwm*, "In the two staircase passages of Almaqah in the Awām temple" (MB 2001 I-105/2). However, the plural form of *ḥṭby* might indicate the two staircase passages inside the entrance to the passageway to Area A, west of the ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate, where the inscription is engraved (Fig. 13).[21]

MḎQNT: This has been interpreted as a religious term and more recently Ch. Robin (2012: 29 f.) considered the term *mḏqnt* as "oratoire".[22] Perhaps it should be considered as "front building, buttress of a structure, entrance-chamber". Recent archaeological investigations at the Awām suggest the term *mḏqnt*, attested in building inscriptions at the Northwest

[13] See the discussion by Agostini 2004: 44–47, cf. also Sabaic *ḥrmt*, "enclosure" and *ḥrm* = Arabic *iḥrām*, "forbidden period" (Beeston *et al.* 1982: 71), i.e. the state of ritual consecration.

[14] On the terminology of the temple in the ancient Near East, cf. Palmer 2012: 18–20.

[15] The term *mn*, interpreted as "outer precinct of sanctuary" (Ja 735/12) in Beeston *et al.* 1982: 86 and compared to the Arabic *minā* in Mecca, does not exist in the Ja 735 inscription published (without a photograph) by A. Jamme and accepted by Ch. Robin (2012: 19). This inscription was rediscovered by the AFSM in 2004. Therefore, the term should be deleted from Beeston *et al.*1982: 86.

[16] Cf. Ja 735/8, 12, *CIAS* 39.11/o3 no. 6/11, Nami NAG 12, MB 2004 I-110, MB 2004 S I-29, MB 2004 S I-31.

[17] In addition to the Awām temple (MB 2001 I-16 = *CIH* 957), there are other temples to Almaqah described as *byt ʾlmqh* (*RÉS* 3945/16, YMN 20/4, YM 18 351/4, *RÉS* 3949, *RÉS* 3950).

[18] On the term *mḥrm*, see the discussion by Agostini 2004: 44–47 and Robin 2012: 23–25.

[19] Note that the word *gwbn* is used as theophoric element in personal names similar to *ʾwm*, cf. the female personal name *rbbt-gwbn*, "fosterling of Gawbān" (Ja 731/6; Sholan 1999: 142).

[20] On the term *gwbn*, see the discussion by Agostini 2004: 51–53 and GOAM 315/2.

[21] The term *ḥṭbm* is attested as a Qatabanic temple name (*RÉS* 3566/3 = CSAI I, 208/3), cf. also Sabaic *bḥr ḥṭbm* (*CIH* 429/3).

[22] See also Ja 411 A,B/4. Von Wissmann (1982: 343) translates *mḏqnt* as "Kultraum"; see also Agostini 2005: 265–267. Relating *mḏqnt* to *miḥrāb* is untenable. *Mḏqnt* is also attested in an inscription from al-Faw and interpreted by M. Kropp (1992: 55 ff.) as "portico (with a stela?)".

Gate, could be interpreted as "porch, antechamber" or more accurately "entryway" or "entrance-chamber" (Ja 552/3).

GNZT: The Awām cemetery is described in one inscription (Ja 702/10) as *mḥrmn gnztn*, "cemetery, sacred enclave".

Other terms for sacred spaces in ancient Yemen

QYF/MQF: It is difficult to comprehend the precise meaning of the noun *qyf*. It could be "cultic stela, cultic plinth";[23] see for example *qyf ʿṯtr w-s^{1}ḥr*, "cultic plinth of ʿAthtar and Saḥar" (*CIH* 458, Ryckmans 1996: 141). The term MQF, derived from *qyf*, might mean "chapel, oratory, a place of worship" outside the temple. For example, *mqf s^{2}ms^1*, "oratory of the Sun Goddess" (*CIH* 288) and *mqf ḏ-s^{1}mwy*, "oratory of Dhū-Samāwī" (*CIH* 524).[24] It can be compared to *maṣṣeba* in the Levant (Nakhai 2001: 161–200).

MZL: "shrine". This term derives from the root NZL, "to settle", and is attested in a Qatabanic inscription as *bny w-s^{1}ḥdṯ gnʾy mzl s^{2}ms^1*, "... he built and constructed the walls of the sanctuary of the Sun-Goddess" (MuB 522/2–3 = CSAI I, 16/2–3).

MKNT: "shrine" (M 203, Ja 411 A, B/3. See also Agostini 2004: 47 f. and Robin 2012: 19).

MḪD: "sanctuary, chapel". This term is most often found in Qatabanic inscriptions (i.e. *RÉS* 3689/9 = CSAI I, 198/9; MuB 650 = CSAI I, 149, cf. also Robin 2012: 36).

MWṬN: "temenos, sacred territory". This term occurs in two penitential inscriptions designating a part of the temple where offences against the divinity occurred. It might be considered to be "temenos, sacred territory" (FB-wādī Shuḍayf 2/6, 7, Haram 33/6 = *CIH* 532/6) rather than "public place, open area", since a public place is not necessarily sacred.[25] Cf. also *gnʾ mwṭn*, "He constructed a wall of sacred territory" (*RÉS* 4006 + *CIH* 170 + *RÉS* 4002). Further evidence is the experience of Sabaean king Shaʿirum Awtar (ca. 210–230 CE). Shaʿirum Awtar fell off a camel and was injured; the reason for the accident was given as *b-kn / rkb-hw / b-mwṭnn* ^{9}[*ḏ*]*-wtrm* ^{10}*m*, "because he rode it (the camel) in the sacred territory of (the temple) Dhū-Watarum" (DAI Maʾrib Bayt ʿAlī 1/8–10). The god Dhū-Samāwī ordered an offering via his oracle because Shaʿirum Awtar had been riding a camel in the sacred territory of the temple (*mwṭnn*), hence committing an offence against the ritual purity of the temple. This means that *mwṭnn* could not be a "public place" as suggested by N. Nebes (2002: 124 ff.), rather *mwṭnn* should be considered as a part of the sacred territory of the temple, where camels are not allowed to enter, as we know from other inscriptions from the Awām temple, where camels and other animals are proscribed (MB 2000 1–7).[26]

GWR: "temenos, sacred territory". This is attested in one Sabaic inscription. The text reads: *yrfʿ/ brʾn / hqny / ḏn / mqṭrn* ^{2}*w-mḏbḥn / l-mrʾhw / wdm / bʿl / m* ^{3}*ḥrmn / bs^{2}rn / lḏt / ḥṭʾ / l-mrʾhw* ^{4}*wdm / k-ʿdy* ^{5}*b-gwrhw / ḏ*^{6}*-b-bs^{2}rn /* (…), "Yafraʿ Barʾān dedicated this incense burner and the slaughter altar to his Lord Waddum of (the temple) Bishrān because he committed a sin when he entered in His sacred territory that in Bishrān…" (az-Zubayrī-Bishār 2).

MWṮB: "seat, residence; shrine". This term derives from the root WṮB, "sit; reside, settle", cf. ṮBT, "shrine" (Beeston *et al.* 1982: 165); cf. *mbny / ṯbt / ʾlʾl* ^{2}*tn*, "the building of the shrine of the deities" (*RÉS* 4531/1–2).[27]

MNṢBT: The term *mnṣbt* derives from the root NṢB, "to erect a stela". The term *nṣb*, "stela, standing stone" refers to a boundary marker meant to separate sacred enclaves from profane territory.[28] It could mean an altar outside the temple, cf. for example *mnṣbt / w-mḥrm / ʾlh-hmw / ḏ-s^{1}mwy*, "altar and the temple of their god Dhū-Samāwī" (Fa 127 = Haram 53). *Nṣb* means "stela", cf. *nṣb-w ʾlmq* ^{4}*hw*, "they erected a stela for Almaqahū" (MṢM 3612/3–4).[29] In pre-Islamic Arabian tradition, *anṣab* were used as altars for blood sacrifices.[30]

WṮN: "stela; boundary stone, boundary mark, boundary". The purpose of this boundary marker was originally, like *nṣb*, "stela", to separate sacred enclaves from profane territory.[31] *Wṯn* could also be used as an altar, cf. ^{1}*wṯn / ʾlmqhw* ^{2}*bʿl / ms^{2}rʿm*, "incense burner of Almaqahū, lord of (the temple) Mashraʿum" (A-20-625). Almaqah ordered a boundary stone be erected, where the dedicator was ordered to sacrifice every year (*CIH* 392). The rites of passing from one territory to another included sacrifice, without which there might be a violation (cf. *RÉS* 4088). Moving a boundary stone is strictly forbidden, as this would change the status of the sacred enclave it was set up to define (*CIH* 654). Boundary stones were protected by Almaqah (Gl 1520) and the Sun Goddess(es), cf. *bʿlty ʾwṯnm*, "the two mistresses of the boundary stones" (Ja 664).

Manifestations of the sacred: The Awām temple as a *locus* of Almaqah's power

The sacred is aptly described by M. Eliade (1987: 11) as "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane". Similarly, according to R. Otto (1920: 28–34), the supernatural shows itself to be "completely different" (*ganz andere*) from the profane.

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[23] The terms *mqf* and *qyf* derive from the root QYF in the sense of "set up a *qyf*" (Beeston *et al.* 1982: 111); cf. also Maraqten 1994: 168 f.

[24] See also the discussion by Robin 2012: 32–34.

[25] See a different interpretation by Robin 2012: 36 f.

[26] Such temple prescriptions have been discovered, for instance that a goat entering the sacred space of the Barʾān temple should be killed (DAI-Barʾān 1990-1). The same is known in North Arabia, where stray beasts entering the sacred territory of the Idol al-Fals would become his possessions (Ibn al-Kalbī/Zaky 1995: 59).

[27] See Ja 411 A,B/3 (Sabaic), Y.90.B.A 3 (Minaic) and also the discussion by Agostini 2004: 55–58 and Robin 2012: 34–36. This term is also attested in Nabataean inscriptions as *mwtb* and understood as "throne of a deity" (Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995: 697 f.; Alpass 2013: 70, 98).

[28] See Agostini 2004: 55–58. Worthy of note are the terms *bāmā*, "high place" and *maṣṣeba*, "standing stone" that designate sacred space in ancient Palestine. See the discussion by Nakhai 2001: 161–200.

[29] Robin 2012: 34 f.

[30] Ibn al-Kalbī/Zaky 1995: 34.

[31] Beeston *et al.* 1982: 166, and see MAFRAY-Darb aṣ-Ṣabī 4 A-H.

The sacred manifests itself through ritual activity, sounds and in the recitation and myths. The sacred power of Almaqah is demonstrated in hundreds of dedicatory inscriptions and in myths such as the hymn to Almaqah (ZI 11), associated with the notional creative power of Almaqah. The power of manifesting Almaqah can be seen in the strophe of the Almaqah hymn discovered at the Awām Temple (ZI 11): This reads: *b-khl* / *ḏ-gb* / *ṣll ws¹ṭ* / *ʾwm* / *hlk* / *ʿḍl*, "By (the power) of Kahl (i.e. Almaqah), who of the paved cultic installation, in the centre of (the temple) Awām, you have manifested your power". We know from the Awām inscriptions that the manifestation of the power of Almaqah was very real to the Sabaeans, and was demonstrated in all aspects of their everyday lives. For instance, they requested oracular responses to social problems or the question of starting a war. Almaqah was also a god of fertility and healing (see further below). Worshippers feared his wrath (*ġlyt*) and appeased him with offerings.

We have many other expressions of the power of Almaqah. Almost all inscriptions discovered in his temple end with the invocation, *b-ʾlmqh*, "by (the power) of Almaqah". Other expressions for praising the power of Almaqah such as *b-ḥwl ʾlmqh*, "by the might of Almaqah"; *b-mqm ʾlmqh*, "by the power of Almaqah"; *b-ʾḏn ʾlmqh*, "by the authority of Almaqah"; *b-ḫyl ʾlmqh*, "by the power of Almaqah"; etc. are well attested. As well, dedicators often put their property and the safety of their families under his protection.

Epithets of Almaqah

The hundreds of dedicatory inscriptions discovered in Almaqah's temple demonstrate how people behaved towards their Lord and expressed their religious superstition. For example, the god Almaqah was always referred to as *bʿl*, "Lord", and the worshipers as "servants" (*ʿbd*, pl. *ʾdm*) in his house/temple.

The manifestation of the divine power of Almaqah is also expressed in his epithets, such as *ʾlmqh ṯhwn bʿl ʾwm*, "Almaqah Thahwān Lord of Awām". Other names are: *ʾlmq*, Almaq;[32] *ṯwn*, Thawn (< *ṯhwn*) "the oracle deity"; *ʾlmq ḏ-gwb*, "Almaqah of the oracle sanctuary" (ZI 11/21–22); *khlm*, Kāhilum "the powerful one" (ZI 11, *passim*, MB 2004 I-95, *passim*).

One of the common epithets of deities is "the bull", as the animal represents power and fertility in the ancient Near East; for example *ṯr ʾl*, "Bull ʾĪl" in Ugarit (Rahmouni 2008: 318–330). Almaqah is also referred to as the *ṯwr bʿlm*, "the Bull of Baʿlum" (literally "the Bull of the Lord"), *ʾlmqh w-ṯwr bʿlm bʿly ʾwm w-ḥrnm*, "Almaqah and the Bull of Baʿlum, the two Lords, of Awām and of (the temple) Ḥarūnum".[33] The attribute *ṯwr*, "bull" also fits Almaqah as a storm god. Part of the name *bʿlm* — *bʿl* — means "Lord", i.e. Almaqah.

Almaqah's power: creation and cosmogony

One important aspect of the divine manifestation of Almaqah is his relationship with cosmogony. In pre-Islamic Yemen, there are only four inscriptions relating to creation myths and all have been discovered in the Awām temple. These are Zaid ʿInān 11 = MB 2004 I-94, MB 2004 I-95 (26 lines), MB 2004 S I-8 (12 lines), and Maʾrib Store 16 (8 lines). All four inscriptions can be considered as hymns or epic poems, praising Almaqah in his struggle against chaos (his enemies).[34]

Zaid ʿInān 11 (ZI 11) has a total of twenty-three lines. It consists of a prologue and six strophes. Each strophe consists of four verses; every strophe has a rhyme and a different rhythm. The language is Sabaic and can be dated, according to its palaeography, to the second half of the 3rd century CE.

The second strophe reads as follows:

Transcription:

1 *b-khl k-bhy ʾl-ḏ-ḏbr-k*
2 *l-gbʾ s²rq l-k*
3 *w-ʾl-ʾl ʾḫḏ yd-k*
4 *ḍr-k tʿrb l-k*

Translation:

1 By (the power of) Kahl (i.e. Almaqah), everything you created is magnificent.
2 to overthrow the East is your intention,
3 and those who did not stand on your side,
4 your enemy will bestow a sin-offering upon you.

Most of these texts would qualify as epic poetry; they could also be termed prayers. Even if we do not understand the exact meaning of some of the expressions therein, their content is still quite clear: The three hymns are not only poetic in style, using rhetorical and stylistic devices such as *parallelismus membrorum*, but above all, they present a narrative, and can therefore be described as creation myths. Such myths occur in the lore of almost all ancient civilizations, as does the struggle against chaos. In ancient Egypt, chaos was manifest in the god Seth; in Mesopotamia, Marduk battled the monster Tiamat, and in Ugarit, Baʿl fought against the dragon, or Yamm, the god of the sea. Both these latter myths parallel the fight of Yahweh against the monster Rahab. Perhaps the best-known cosmogony of the ancient Near East was the Babylonian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*, which was recited during the New Year, or *Akītu*, festival.[35] Similarly, the three hymns from the Awām Temple praise the power of Almaqah in his victory over "the enemy" (chaos).

The ceremony of the sacred marriage (*hieros gamos*) was usually considered to be an extremely holy ritual in the

[32] Ja 713/8, ZI 11/15, MB 2005 I-58/2.

[33] This interpretation differs from those proposed previously; see the discussion by Sima (2000: 154–158).

[34] Zaid ʿInān 11 was discovered during the AFSM excavations at the Awām temple in the 1950s, rediscovered by the AFSM expedition in 2004, and published by M. Iryānī in 2005: Iryānī 2005: 64–106.

[35] On the notion of cosmogony in general, cf. Long 2005 III: 1985–1991. On creation myths in the ancient Near East, cf. Clifford 1994.

ancient Near East and was achieved in the most sacred spaces in the temples (Palmer 2012: 90–94). Although the epigraphic evidence is scanty, some information exists about the *hieros gamos* in ancient Yemen (Müller 1993: 15–28). The Almaqah hymn discovered in the Awām temple might have been a part of this ritual (see above).

The Awām temple as a place of communication between the god and the people

The Awām temple as a cosmic axis

The Awām temple was the centre of communication between the divinity Almaqah, and his worshippers, the Sabaean people. Many inscriptions discovered therein document these encounters. Thus the Awām was the *axis mundi* (cosmic axis) — a pillar of the universe connecting earth and heaven.[36] Through this pillar, supplicants could be connected to Almaqah.[37]

The Awām temple as the home of the oracle

The Awām temple was the place of revelation and divination *par excellence* and as such, it contained special spaces, such as the sanctuary of the oracle that was reserved for oracular communication. One verse of the hymn to Almaqah (ZI 11/21–22) reads, *ʾl* ^{22}*mq ḏ-gwb rfq*, "Almaqa the owner of the oracle sanctuary is a companion".

The most-attested epithet of Almaqah is *ʾlmqh ṯhwn bʿl ʾwm*, "Almaqah Thahwān Lord of Awām". Thahwān, deriving from the root ṮHW, "to announce, to speak" has been interpreted as "the oracle god" (Höfner 1970: 261). The oracle was therefore probably the manifestation of the god Almaqah.

Apparently, the Awām was in constant use throughout the year; people visited the temple, dedicated their offerings and expressed their hopes and fears for the future. The function of the Awām as an oracle temple is recorded in dozens of inscriptions discovered therein. Many dedications were made by order of the oracle (*ms*^{1}*ʾl*), emanating directly from Almaqah, received in a dream by the worshipper or through priestly intervention.[38]

Apparently *gwbn*, "the oracle temple", was a specific shrine inside the Sacred Sanctuary Precinct of the Awām temple. It was restricted for the medium, through whom Almaqah prophesied, and the priests mediated (see above). In this shrine there were rooms reserved for incubation, the practice of sleeping in a temple or a sacred enclave in order to receive an oracle. Incubation was practiced in the ancient world and especially in the ancient Near East (Butler 1998: 217–239; Zgoll 2006: 309–343) and in pre-Islamic Arabia (Fahd 2001: 542–545).

The term *ṣdġ* is used for "oracular incubation" or "incubation dream". This is recorded in numerous inscriptions at the Awām temple. Oracular dreams and visions were viewed as media by the oracular order of Almaqah (cf. Ja 721, *RÉS* 4151/3–8; MB 2004 S I-68).

Other rooms inside the Sacred Sanctuary Precinct were reserved for those people, special military leaders, who were sent to the Awām temple to consult a *Kriegsorakel* (*ḥrb*, *tḥrb*, Nami NAG 12; MB 2004 I-110). Sometimes the term *ms*^{1}*ʾl*, "oracle" is only used to indicate oracles of war (i.e. *CIH* 397). The place where the *ḥrb*-ritual was performed should be called *mḥrb* and thus designate a room or a sacred space inside the Ovoid Sanctuary Precinct, but unfortunately this area has not yet been identified.[39] The *ḥrb*-ritual is similar to the Arabic concept of *istiḫāra*, possibly connected to *ṣalāt al-istiḫāra*, practiced in Islam.[40]

The Awām temple as a place of pilgrimage

Data about pilgrimages from ancient South Arabian inscriptions indicate both communal practices and rites exclusive to individual deities. The most important pilgrimage festival in ancient Yemen was undertaken for Almaqah, in a procession to the Awām temple. A processional road connected the Ḥarūnum temple in the city of Maʾrib with the Awām temple; there specific rituals connected with the pilgrimage were performed (MB 2002 I-20).

Pilgrimage was carried out every year in the Sabaic month of Dhū-Abhay (similar to Dhū al-Ḥijja in the Islamic calendar). Several inscriptions from the Awām (YM 375/4–6) verify this. A number also mention pilgrimage (Ja 669/14–15). AFSM excavations from 2004 to 2006 uncovered even more inscriptions left by pilgrims (i.e. MB 2004 I-109, MB 2004 S I-62).[41]

No concrete evidence about circumambulation is available. It might have been part of the rituals inside the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. M. Höfner (1970: 328–330) translates the term *qyf* as "Umlauf", "circulation", certainly a clue to the performance of this practice.

We have another text recording a pilgrimage to Maʾrib, this time by order of the god Taʾlab (Ryckmans 1993: 366 ff.). Citizens of Sumʿay, north of Ṣanʿāʾ, were directed to undertake a pilgrimage to Almaqah in Maʾrib during the month of Dhū-Abhay (*RÉS* 4176/1). Sacrifice, noted in the above-mentioned inscription, was an important part of the pilgrimage festival, and occurred during the month of Dhū-Abhay. Sacrifices for the god Almaqah were actually made on a specific day, namely the seventh of Dhū-Abhay, mentioned on some inscribed altars.[42] There may even have been certain types of altars reserved for pilgrimages, such

[36] Cf. the temple name é.dim.an.ki, "House, Bond (lit.: Pole) of Heaven and Underworld," a sanctuary at Borsippa (George 1993: 75).

[37] Dozens of thanksgiving inscriptions found in the temple proved this. On the notion of *axis mundi*, cf. Eliade 1987: 36 f., 2005 III: 1501–1505 and Wightman 2007: 904–915. On the Islamic conception of *axis mundi* (Arabic *ʿamad*), see Akkach 2005: 134–141.

[38] See Stein 2006: 293–312.

[39] On the root *ḥrb* see the discussion by Agostini 2004: 48–51.

[40] On *ṣalāt al-istiḫāra*, cf. Fahd 2002: 237–242.

[41] On pilgrimage in ancient Yemen, cf. *RÉS* 4176, Müller 1997: 89–110, 2002: 178 f., MB 2002 I-20, cf. Maraqten 2004: 157–163. Basically, two verbal stems, *hwfr* and *hḥḍr*, mean "to perform a pilgrimage" (Beeston *et al.* 1982: 66, 157 ff.). Further, the word *qs*^{1}*d* also means "pilgrims"; see *qs*^{1}*d* / *s*^{2}*ʿbn* / *s*^{1}*mʿy*, "pilgrims of the tribe Sumʿay" (*RÉS* 4176/14); *ḥgg*, "to perform a pilgrimage" (Beeston *et al.* 1982: 66) and *s*^{1}*bʾ*, "to carry out an undertaking, e.g. religious pilgrimage" (Beeston *et al.* 1982: 122).

[42] See *CIH* 694 and Ṭayrān 2003: 245 ff. Museum of the Department of Archaeology and Museology, Riyadh University, nos. 74, 76.



Fig. 2. Peristyle Hall of the Awām temple. Dedicatory inscriptions (AFSM archive).

as the *mḥḏrt*-altar (Maraqten 1994: 169). It is significant that families also used their own altars during pilgrimages (*RÉS* 4482 = *CIH* 670, cf. *RÉS* 4484, *CIH* 694).

The Awām temple as a place of healing

The god Almaqah was the most powerful healing deity in ancient Yemen and consequently his temple was a popular resource.[43] Patients were guided and healed in their dreams during incubation sleep, undertaken in designated areas in the Sacred Sanctuary Precinct. Dozens of inscriptions from the Awām tell us about the illness and recovery experienced by both commoners and royalty alike (Fig. 2). Many dedications of thanksgiving resulted (i.e. Ja 706, Ja 711 Ja 567, MB 2005 I-131).

The Awām temple as an icon of the Kingdom of Sabaʾ

The Awām as sacred space is the visual metaphor for the religious world of Sabaʾ. This is expressed in the hymn to Almaqah as follows: *w-l-mḥrm-k d-ʾ*s^{1}*k mṯl ḏ-ʾqdm l-k fʿl*, "And (magnificent) like of your Maḥram (i.e. the Awām temple), I have never seen, which the leaders have constructed for you" (ZI 11, see above). The temple was considered to be the centre of the universe in which Almaqah dwelt (*byt ʾlmqh*) with all his power. This magnificent structure, with its imposing gateway, was a symbol of prestige for the Sabaeans, similar to the way Mesopotamians felt about ziggurats, or Egyptians, pyramids.[44] People living in Ma'rib oasis would have observed the mysterious and attractive temple from afar and experienced *mysterium tremendous*, the feeling of terror inspired by the sacred (Otto 1920: 13–27), probably similar to the Arabic *rahba*, "fear" of a Moslem seeing the Kaʿba for the first time.

Apparently, the symbol of the Sabaeans in the early Sabaic period (*ḏ-ḫ*, abbreviation of the Sabaean royal clan **ḏ-ḫll*, Dhū-Ḫalīl, Fig. 3), started to gradually disappear sometime around the middle of the first millennium. The Almaqah symbol, which seems to have stood for "Almaqah Thahwān Lord of Awām", was adapted as a symbol of the State of Sabaʾ (Fig. 4). This was then used in association with Sabaic inscriptions and on coins. It occurs not only in the Awām, but can also be found in the Jawf, Ṣirwāḥ and the highland territories of the Sabaeans.



Fig. 3. Symbol of Dhū-Khalīl (M. Maraqten).



Fig. 4. Symbol of Almaqah (M. Maraqten).

[43] See especially Glanzman 2002: 187–201. On the role of temples in healing people in Mesopotamia, Greece, and the Bible, cf. the general presentation of the topic in Avalos 1995.

[44] There were no towers on the oval wall of the Awām, thus the assumption of M. Höfner (1970: 321) that the Oval Sanctuary Precinct had a military function seems untenable. W.W. Müller (1989: 562) suggests that the oval wall was meant to keep out sand and debris, which would otherwise accumulate in the precinct. However, the temple complex is located inside the south oasis and surely was protected from encroaching sand by the surrounding vegetation. The oval wall was to emphasize the strength of the Awām much similar to the *migdāl*/fortified temples of Syria-Palestine and the pylon and fortified enclosure walls of the Egyptian temples.

The manifestation of Almaqah legitimized royal power: The Awām temple as the seat of the Sabaean tribes played a significant role in legitimizing the political power of Sabaean rulers (Korotayev 2003: 65–76). Thus, the Sabaeans called themselves *wld ʾlmqh*, "the offspring of Almaqah" (*RÉS* 3945/5). Sabaean rulers frequented the important temple and made their own dedications. The kings of Sabaʾ and dhū-Raydān also dedicated to Almaqah, notably ʿAmdān Bayin Yuhaqbiḍ (ca. 100–120 CE, fig. 14)[45] and Shammar Yuharʿish (e.g. Sh 35, ca. 287–312 BCE). Rulers and state officials were connected with temple construction and temple ideology; for instance the *mukarrib* Yadaʿʾīl Dharīḥ (ca. 670 BCE), was described as the builder of temples for Almaqah, including the Awām temple, the Almaqah temple in Ṣirwāh and the Maʿrabum temple in al-Masājid, south of Maʾrib (von Wissmann 1982: 183–224, Glanzman 2003: 183–198).

The Awām temple was the essential economic and social institution in ancient Yemen and naturally played a central role in the religious life of Sabaʾ. The temple organized, integrated and unified Sabaean society; this can be seen in the offerings recorded in hundreds of inscriptions by individuals, officials and members of the different tribes and clans forming Sabaean society.[46]

The Awām temple also had a central role as a legal institution. In several inscriptions, Almaqah issued laws to priests or kings, etc. (e.g. MB 2002-28). The public looked to Almaqah for solutions to social problems, such as crimes like homicide being committed. These were dealt with in the temple or according to the oracular response of Almaqah (Ja 700, MB 2005 I-31, MB 2002 I-5). This close interrelationship between the temple and law is well known in the ancient Near East.

The Awām was also a source of good luck, aid, and good omens. Possibly the most-attested Sabaean personal names in the first three centuries CE are names compounded with the name of the temple; for example, *ʾwm* as a theophoric element in *whbʾwm*, "present of Awām" (e.g. Ja 565/2); *s¹ʿdʾwm*, "Awām has given" e.g. Ja 565/2); *rṯdʾwm*, "Awām has protected" (*CIH* 398/17); *mrṯdʾwm*, "protégée of Awām" (Bron 9/4); *ḥs³fʾwm*, "Awām has saved" (Gl 1725/1); *rbbʾwm*, "fostering of Awām" (Ja 698/1); and the woman's name *kmlʾwm*, "Awām is perfect" (Sholan 1999: 128) among numerous examples.

The Awām as a temple of Almaqah was the most important source of abundance and prosperity and therefore also a centre of redistribution. Not only the tribe of Sabaʾ, but also other tribes and clans that made up the Sabaean kingdom, came there to make offerings of thanksgiving for prosperity. Thus, the Awām temple and its cult were central to the economic structure of the Sabaean kingdom.

Some architectural expressions of sacred space at the Awām Temple

Architectural expressions related to sacred spaces in the Awām temple are difficult to define. Some of these concepts will be examined in discussions about diversity in temple ritual and architecture.

Architectural expressions for sacred spaces in the Awām might be divided into two categories: a) general plan and layout of the temple, and b) construction and ornamentation.

General plan and layout of the Awām temple

Sacred territory of the Awām: components

- The "land" of Almaqah

The sacred territory of Awām is described in a recently discovered inscription as *ʾrḍ ʾlmqh b-ʾwm*, "the land of Almaqah in Awām" (MB 2002 I-6). This 'land' consisted of cultivated fields, palm groves and possibly a market and may have taken up a large part of the east side of the south oasis of Maʾrib. The land was leased for cultivation to people who paid a tithe to the temple (Sima 1999: 159–165).[47] The Awām temple was erected in the centre of this area, which had the same name Awām. This seems to have been similar to the North-Arabian concept of *ḥimā* (Wellhausen 1897: 105–109; Serjeant 2005 VI: 3776–3778; King 2002: 91 ff.), namely territory protected or sacred to the temple. The Awām temple is also specifically described as *mḥrmn ḏ-ʾwm* "literally, the temple, which is in Awām".[48]

- The Awām temenos or protected enclave

The word "temenos" here not only means the area within the walled enclosure, but also the whole area surrounding it related to the Awām complex. In addition to the Awām complex, the terminus *mḥrm*, "protected enclave" describes the whole area wherein the different structures of the Awām were erected (Fig. 5); all structures of the Awām temple complex — housing for priests, auxiliary rooms, and workshops for metalworkers, stonemasons, scribes, artists and other craftsmen. These structures were erected on a natural mound, which was dedicated to the

[45] MB 2001 I-102, MB 2002 I-7.

[46] The AFSM excavations carried out in the temple from1998 to 2006 yielded more than 500 inscriptions.

[47] This is also attested in MB 2002 I-6 and see also *mlk ʾlmqh*, "domain of Almaqah" (Ja 761/1–3, Fa 71 10–12); *qny ʾlmqh*, "property of Almaqah" (MB 2002 I-7); *mbʿl ʾlmqh*, "property of Almaqah" (Ja 554); and *ʿs²t ʾlmqh*, "corn land of Almaqah" (Fa 63/2, Sh 18/2, MB 2001 I-110/1).

[48] North Arabian deities such as Dhū al-Shara (Wellhausen 1897: 49; Hawting 1999: 123 f.), *ḥimā* of al-ʿUzzā in Wādī Ḥurād (Ibn al-Kalbī/Zaky 1995: 19) or the *ḥimā* of Allāt in aṭ-Ṭaʾf (Wellhausen 1897: 108), *ḥimā* of al-ʾUqayṣir (Ibn al-Kalbī/Zaky 1995: 38) and al-Galsad (Wellhausen 1897: 53 f.). In pre-Islamic Arabia, it seems that specific blood sacrifices were performed and dedicated directly to the deity at the sacred border stones of the temple temenos, before entering this sacred area. Of interest is the comment by anthropologist A. van Gennep (1960: 15–16): "More often the boundary is marked by an object — a stake, portal, or upright rock, (milestone or landmark) — whose installation at that particular spot had been accompanied by rites of consecration. (...) The prohibition against the entering a given territory is therefore intrinsically magico-religious". This is similar to performing sacrifice on the threshold of a house or temple.

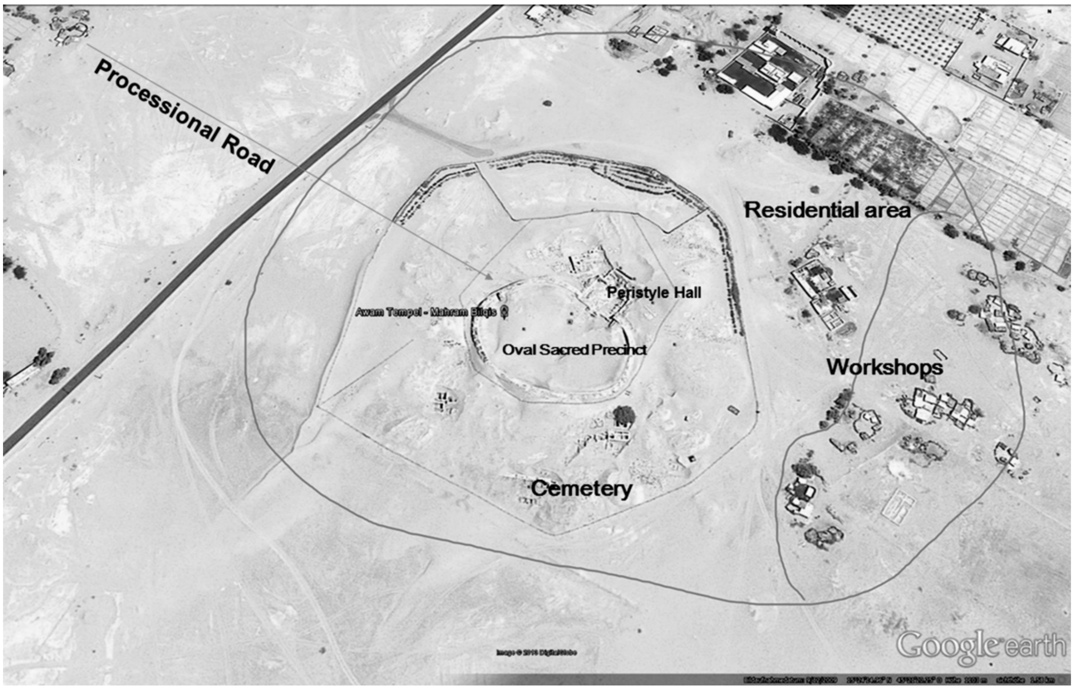


Fig. 5. The Awām temenos, protected enclave (AFSM archive).

worship of Almaqah.[49] No walls enclosing the different parts of the temple and the protected enclave have yet been found; however, the boundaries of the temenos might have been marked by stones (*ʾwṯn*) similar to those surrounding the temple of the Minaean god Nakraḥ in Darb aṣ-Ṣabī in the Jawf, fixed according to an oracle of the god Nakraḥ (MAFRAY-Darb aṣ-Ṣabī 1). In another text this is clearly mentioned: *qf ḏn mḥrmn*, "He fixed the cultic border stones of the temple" (MAFRAY-Darb al-Ṣabī 4 A-H).[50]

The *temenos* of the temple of Jār al-Labbāʾ in the Jawf was fixed by boundary stones, which were used for sacrifice (Beeston 1949: 207–228). A further example states: *ʾwṯn ḏ-s^1mwy*, "boundary stones of (the temple of) Dhū-Samāwī" (*CIH* 612 + *CIH* 522/1). Compare also the ḥaram of Mecca where the sacred territory was fixed with *ʾanṣab*, "standing stones, cultic stones by the father of the monotheist Ibrahīm (Al-Azraqī/Duhaysh 2003: 682–686).

- The Awām temple complex

This complex may have developed from a small shrine into an enormous conglomerate during its long history of more than 1,500 years. Its final size can be estimated at ca. 15,000 m^2 including its centre, the Oval Sanctuary Precinct, of ca. 5,107 m^2. The Awām complex consisted of a propylaeum, (i.e. an entrance of eight pillars), Area A including Building I, an administrative area containing the Entrance Hall and auxiliary rooms, the Annex, the Peristyle Hall, the Oval Sanctuary Precinct and the Awām cemetery, as well as other domestic buildings (Fig. 5). The Annex and the Peristyle Hall existed until the end of the 6th century BCE when an open cultic courtyard and structures were erected and added to the Oval Sanctuary Precinct (Fig. 6). However, only a small portion of the temple complex of Awām has been excavated, a fact that makes it difficult to define accurately the sacred spaces of the buildings.

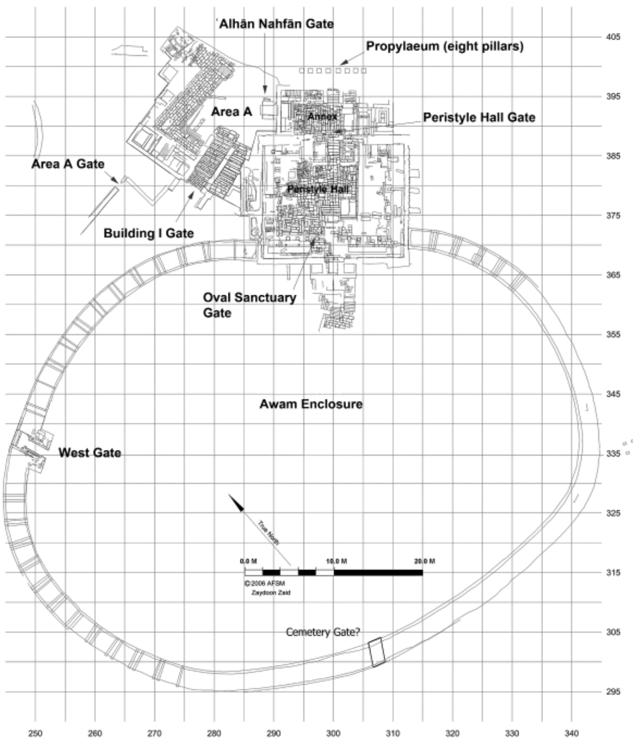


Fig. 6. Awām Complex, top plan (AFSM archive).

[49] Geologist Maurice J. Grolier of the AFSM team observed this. The Almaqah temple in Ṣirwāḥ was also constructed on a platform (Röring 2007: 93). Podium temples using elevated platforms as substructures have been discovered in ancient South Arabia (Gerlach & Schnelle 2013: 313, 318), see also Sedov 2005: 39–46. Usually temples in the ancient Near East were built on platforms (Lundquist 1983: 209 f.).

[50] Cf. Robin 2012: 23 f.



Fig. 7. The hypothetical layout of the processional road from Ma'rib to Awām (Satellite image: GoogleEarth – Digital Globe 2014; photographs: J. Schiettecatte, Ch. Robin; Layout: J. Schiettecatte).

The Awām as an extra muros *temple*

In general, *extra muros* temples were linked with the civic life in urban centres; in Ma'rib, a processional road linked the Awām with the *intra muros* temple Ḥarūnum (*ḥrnm*) (Fig. 7). It is located ca. 3.5 km south of the ancient city of Ma'rib. The builders of the Awām temple considered the physical setting of the temple in regard to the surrounding area of Ma'rib. This temple was visible over a large area and particularly to worshipers or pilgrims, who gathered first in the city of Ma'rib and started their cultic rituals in the Almaqah temple of Ḥarūnum, processing towards the Awām temple using "the processional road of Awām between Ḥarūnum and Awām" (*ms¹b' 'wm byn ḥrnm w-'wm*). This road was sacred and no one was allowed to bother the pilgrims (MB 2001 I-20).[51]

Techniques of construction and ornamentation

The Awām temple as an embodiment of the Cosmic Mountain

Among hundreds of inscriptions discovered at the Awām temple, only few texts deal directly with the construction of the temple. Specific architectural features were meant to signify major symbols of Awām temple mythology such as *'wm byt 'lmqh*, "Awām, the dwelling house of Almaqah", or *gwbn*, "the oracle sanctuary". This also includes a raised platform within the temple's sacred area representing the primordial mound.[52] In pre-temple times, it appears a cultic place was built around a wellspring located inside the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. A recently discovered inscription from the Awām mentions *b'rn b-ws¹ṭ mḥrmn*, "a well in the centre of the temple" (MB 2006 I-9). In general, water is considered a primordial component, which underlies creation myths (Lundquist 1983: 208 f., Palmer 2012: 105–108). The water component has even been proven in ground-penetrating radar investigations (Moorman *et al.* 2001: 179–187; Jones & Maki 2006).

It seems that two cosmic forms of temples were common among the Sabaeans, the oval and the rectangular form. Only three oval temples are known in the kingdom of Saba': the Oval Sanctuary Precinct of Awām; Aw'āl Ṣirwāḥ, the Almaqah temple in Ṣirwāḥ; and the temple Raḥbān dedicated to Ta'lab on the Jabal Riyām, north of Ṣan'ā'.[53] This form of this magnificent structure mimics the cosmic mountain.

Geomorphological investigations have shown that the Awām temple was erected on a high natural platform, making the temple even more impressive to the viewer. This platform included the aforementioned wellspring

[51] Ground-penetrating radar proved the existence of this road (Moorman *et al.* 2001: 185 f.; Jones & Maki 2006). On procession in ancient Yemen, cf. Robin 2012: 76–78 and in North Arabia, cf. Lammens 1919: 39–101.

[52] On this aspect of the construction of temples in the ancient Near East, cf. Palmer 2012: 103–108.

[53] On Riyām temple, see Jung 1988: 201 f. Religious structures with oval shape are known in eastern Arabia (Wightman 2007: 259 f.). Recent study concerning the temple of Ta'lab Riyām: Arbach & Schiettecatte: 37–68.

cultic place. The raised area within the temple's sacred area probably represented the primordial mound or cosmic mountain. This relates closely to the concept of *imago mundi* — the notion that architectural shapes of any size can be images or imitations of the superior cosmos. [54] The 'primordial mound' figures heavily in early Egyptian temples and tomb construction and mythology (Palmer 2012: 58, 339 f.).

In one inscription, the Awām temple is described as *ʿr ʾwm*, "the high place or mound of Awām" (MB 2004 I-15, Fig. 8). The term *ʿr* in this text indicates the elevated temple platform. This is known from other Sabaic inscriptions, cf. s^2ms^1 / *ʿlyt* / *bʿlt* / *ʿr* / s^2*ḥrrm*, "Shams ʿĀliyat Mistress of ʿUr Shaḥrurum" (*RÉS* 3958 10–11). The Awām is then considered to be an embodiment of the cosmic mountain.



Fig. 8. Inscription MB 2004 I-15. Dedication to Almaqah Lord of ʿUrr Awām (AFSM archive).

Transcription of MB 2004 I-15:

1 [… / ʾ]*qwl* / / s^2ʿ
2 […] *w* / *ʾmlkn* / *ʿdy* / *b*=
3 *yt* / *ḏmhdmm* / *hqny* / *ʾlmqhw* / *bʿl* /
4 *ʿr* / *ʾwm* / *ṣlmn* / *ḏḏhbn* / *ḏbhw* / *ḥm*=
5 *d* / *mqm* / / *ʾlmqhw* / *bḏt* / s^2*kr* / *lhw* / *ʾlm*=
6 *qhw* / *ḥywm* / *wbny* / *mʿḍlm* / *bḏt* / *ḫrg*=
7 *w* /*k*[…]

Translation:

1 (…) the tribal leader of Shaʿb (…)
2 (…) the kings into
3 house Dhū-Mahdamum dedicated to Almaqah, lord
4 of the ʿUrr of Awām, the bronze statuette with which he thanked
5 the might of Almaqah because Almaqah has defeated for him
6 Ḥaywum and the Banī Maʿḍalum as they brought a lawsuit (against him)
7 (…)

The idea of the sacred mountain as the navel of the world sprang from the concept of the sacred mountain as the primordial mount. This can be seen in the description of the Awām temple as *ʿr ʾwm* "mount of Awām". Mountains in ancient Yemen, such as Jabal Riyām, north of Ṣanʿāʾ, are frequently regarded as sanctuaries and natural temples. [55] One of the well-known cosmic mountains in ancient Yemen was Jabal al-Lawdh (Robin & Breton 1982: 590–629; Daum 1999: 223–232). We have good information about gods related to mountains as well as temples erected on the summits of mountains (Robin 1981: 263–281, 2012: 38). When possible, temples were erected on high mountains; a Sabaean temple was discovered on the top of Jabal Balaq al-Awsaṭ (Schmidt 1997–1998: 12 f.). The idea of the primordial mount, the mountain as the *omphalos* (the navel of the earth), [56] and the cosmic mountain, all relate to the underlying principle of sacred space (Palmer 2012: 61–67).

Construction and layout of the Awām temple

Our knowledge of the construction and function of temples in ancient Yemen has been increased in recent years due to the excavation of several temples (Jung 1988: 177–218; Schmidt 1997–1998; Sedov 2005; Wightman 2007: 261–280; Gerlach & Schnelle 2013: 209–220; Darles 2014). These include the Awām temple (Glanzman 1999, 2002), Barʾān temple in Maʾrib (Vogt *et al.* 2000), "The ibexes of Ṣirwāḥ" (*ʾwʿl ṣrwḥ)*, [57] the Almaqah temple in Ṣirwāḥ (Röring 2007; Schmidt 2007: 203–239), Timnaʿ (Breton *et al.* 1997: 33–72) and the ʿAthtar dhū-Riṣāfum temple in as-Sawdāʾ (Breton (ed.) 2012). [58] Inscriptions discovered in these temples or inscriptions relating to the construction of temples have also given us much more information (Agostini 2005: 64–90). [59]

Selection of location and foundation ceremonies for the Awām temple

Apparently, the first step in the construction of the Awām temple was the selection of land, possibly a high place close to a spring. No textual data is available about this initial phase. After the selection, specific rites would be performed on the spot, rites to separate the newly sacred construction

[54] On this concept in the ancient Near East, cf. Lundquist 1983: 207 f. Cf. also the name of the cella of Aššur temple, é.šár.ra in the city of Aššur, é.ḫur.sağ.gal.kur.kur.ra, "House of the Great Mountain of the Lands"(George 1993: 100).

[55] The concept of mountains as the pillars of heaven is well-known in the ancient Near East, cf. Lundquist 1983: 207; Palmer 2012: 59–61; Ragavan 2013: 3–5.

[56] Islamic sources state that Mecca was the *omphalos* of the earth (Akkach 2005: 179–183). On the concept of the center of the world cf. Eliade 2005 III: 1501–1505.

[57] The ibex occurs as a part of temple names in Mesopotamia: *é.dàra. an.na*, "House of the Ibex of Heaven", cella of Zarpanitum in *é.sag.íl* temple at Babylon (George 1993: 74).

[58] On textual data about the construction of temples in the ancient Near East, see Boda & Novotny 2010.

[59] The entire epigraphic evidence relating to temples has yet to be compiled.



Fig. 9. Inscription MB 2001 I-16 = *CIH* 957 (AFSM archive).

from the surrounding area. We do have some information about foundation ceremonies or building rituals not part of the temple cult, but rather purification and apotropaic rituals.[60]
Several inscriptions tell us about the construction of temples and that these temple builders dedicated to specific deities. Some of the records are unfortunately very short such as the following text (Muḥafaẓat Maʾrib 23, Nebes 2011: 372).

1 *yṯʿʾmr / bn / ykrbmlk*
2 *bny / byt / hwbs^1*

Translation:

1 Yathaʿʾamar, son of Yakrubmalik,
2 constructed the temple of Hawbas.

No data is yet available about making foundation deposits at the Awām temple. This custom was part of ceremonies accompanying the founding of temples in the ancient Near East (Palmer 2012: 300).[61] The ceremonies could be quite elaborate and costly.
Hitherto we have ten inscriptions concerning the construction of the Oval Sanctuary Precinct of the Awām temple. These date from the first quarter of the 7th century BCE to the end of the 3rd century CE.[62] One part comes from the building inscription of Yadaʿʾīl Dharīḥ, about the foundation rituals of the temple. All other relevant inscriptions are about the construction of specific parts of the oval wall. The inscriptions of Yadaʿʾīl Dharīḥ (ca. 670 BCE) that document the construction of the Almaqah temples — Awʿāl Ṣirwāḥ in Ṣirwāḥ (*CIH* 366),[63] Awām in Maʾrib and Maʿrabum in al-Masājid (*RÉS* 3949, *RÉS* 3950) — are concerned with the foundation ceremonies.[64] The Awām inscription of Yadaʿʾīl Dharīḥ reads: / *ydʿʾl* / *ḏrḥ* / *bn* / *s^{1}mhʿly* / *mkrb* / *s^{1}bʾ* / *gnʾ* / *ʾwm* / *byt* / *ʾlmqh* / *ywm* / *ḏbḥ* / *ʿṯtr* / *whwṣt* / *kl* / *gwm* / *ḏʾlm* / *ws^{2}ymm* / *wḏḥblm* / *w*[*ḏḥmrm* / *bʿṯtr*/ *wbʾlm*]*qh*, "Yadaʿʾīl Dharīḥ, son of Sumhuʿalī, mukarrib of Sabaʾ has constructed the oval wall of Awām, the temple of Almaqah, when he conducted a slaughter sacrifice to the god ʿAthtar, and organized every community that has a god and patron as well as the [community] that has a covenant and federation bond. By ʿAthtar and by Almaqah" (MB 2001 I-16 = *CIH* 957, Fig. 9).
The slaughtering of animals for the god ʿAthtar mentioned in this text could be considered as a building sacrifice, made specifically on the occasion of the construction of the temple, and as such, belonging to the foundation ceremony of the Awām. The custom of sacrifice for the construction of a building was a widespread practice in the ancient Near East.[65] The intention of this ritual was to consecrate the place by declaring it sanctified.[66]

60 About temple foundation rituals in Mesopotamia, cf. Ambos 2010: 221–237.

61 Foundation deposits such as jars, gold or silver statuettes and other valuable items, made especially for temples, were often buried beneath them or inserted in their masonry. Most of these have been discovered in Mesopotamia, cf. Ambos 2010: 229–233.

62 These are the inscriptions engraved on the exterior wall of the Oval Sanctuary Precinct (Ja 550–557, *CIH* 373, *CIH* 957 = MB 2001 I-16). The recently discovered text MB 2004 S I-31 records that a person thanked Almaqah "for the carrying out of a restoration in the Awām temple" (*l-hkln / b-ws^{1}ṭ ^{10}mḥrmn / ḏ-ʾwm*). The inscription *CIH* 373 mentions Karibʾīl Watar Yuhanʿim (ca. 45–60 CE) in connection with building activities.

63 See Nebes 2011: 372 f.

64 About the temple building activities of Yadaʿʾīl Dharīḥ, cf. Glanzman 2003: 183–198.

65 Building sacrifices were also performed in Mesopotamia, cf. Ambos 2010: 230. For building sacrifices and foundation deposits in Greece, cf. Zeis 1994: 18–86.

66 There are examples of building sacrifices being buried under houses or in the foundations. In the building of a house, a blood sacrifice at the first crossing of the threshold was made to ward off evil. This custom continued until modern times (van Gennep 1960: 24 f.), for instance in Palestine. Usually the animal was slaughtered on the threshold of the

Further epigraphic evidence for foundation rituals might be the displaying of the image of the god for whom the temple was being built. A text tells us about a procession carrying back the image of the god Aranyadaʿ, the city god of Nashshān.[67] Apparently, this image was processed from Nashshān to Kamnā for the installation of a new temple for Aranyadaʿ in Kamnā and then was brought back to Nashshān.[68] On this occasion an inscribed bronze altar was dedicated. The inscription reads: *Yṯʿʾmr wtr bn ykrbmlk mkrb s^{1}bʾ hqny ʾrnydʿ* ^{2}*[s^2]ymn ywm ʾtw ʾrnydʿ bn kmnhw ʿd n[s^2]n*, "Yathaʿʾamar Watar, son of Yakrubmalik, mukarrib of Sabaʾ dedicated (this altar) to Aranyadaʿ the patron god, when (the image) of Aranyadaʿ returned (in a procession) from Kamnā to Nashshān" (AO 31 929/1–2).[69]

The Awām temple as divine plan

Usually, a temple or any other place of worship, cultic objects such as an altar or stela are initiated on the place of the hierophany to permit a permanent access to the sacred. The spot thus becomes a "connection" (*templum*) through sacred time (*tempus*), where worshippers can have permanent access to the god.

No inscription has yet proven that the Awām temple was built by order of a divinity; however, there is no doubt that the construction of temples in ancient Yemen was carried out according to divine command, since offerings were performed to answer this demand.

The Awām temple represented the *Weltanschauung* of the Sabaeans. The layout of the Awām was fixed according to a clearly defined symmetrical plan including measurements and axial orientation.[70] Possibly, the plan of the Awām temple was revealed to a Sabaean ruler by Almaqah. No accurate epigraphic evidence is available. However, we have the clear order of the Sun-Goddess Dhat-Ḥamīm, given through an oracle, to build a temple (DJE 17).[71] That text reads:

Transcription:

1 *rms^{1}m / wʿms^{1}mʿ / wḏrḥʾl / wbnh=*
2 *mw / yṯʿm / wbrqm / bnw / rms^{1}m / w*
3 *s^{1}myʿm / brʾw / mḥrmn / s^{2}ms^{1}hmw / w*
4 *ynn / bmlʾ / wms^{1}ʾl / tʾlb / rymm*
5 *wbqht / wms^{1}ʾl / s^{2}ms^{1}m / ḏwynn*

Translation:

1 Ramsūm, ʿAmmsamiʿ and Dharaḥʾīl and
2 their sons Yathaʿum and Bāriqum of clan Ramsum
3 and Sumayʿum have constructed the temple of their Sun-Goddess
4 (of the temple) Waynān as fulfilment and according to the oracle of Taʾlab Riyāmum
5 and according to the order and oracle of the Sun-Goddess of Waynān.

Heaven-sent temple plans are well attested in other parts of the ancient Near East (Lundquist 1983: 211 f.; Palmer 2012: 85–90). The original Kaʿba was built by an order of God for Adam on the plan of his own residence in heaven (Akkach 2005: 182 f.). In the concept of a heavenly temple, the earthly temple is believed to be a copy, an exact image of the cosmic structure. A good example is the notion of a pattern for a sanctuary revealed in the incubation dream of Gudea of Lagash through the god Ningirsu (Palmer 2012: 145).

Pillars and the astrological orientation of the Awām temple

Awām was accommodated to a wider urban and natural landscape. The temple complex was oriented towards the rising sun, facing north-east. Eight pillars marked the propylaeum (Fig. 1). The pillars are the most visible architectural feature, the most important symbols and are common to most religious structures in ancient Yemen. Some temples have two pillars, those in the city of Maʾrib have four, in Ṣirwāḥ five and six (ʾAwʿāl Ṣirwāḥ); six in the Barʾān Temple (Maʾrib); six in Maʿrabum (al-Masājid, South of Maʾrib) and eight in the Ḥarūnum temple and the Awām temple in Maʾrib.[72] Apparently, these architectural elements served various purposes. They may have been associated with mythology. Although their exact significance is unknown, they at least signalled to visitors that they were leaving the profane world behind and entering the realm of the god.

In the Awām, the eight pillars probably belong to the earliest phase of the temple construction — the Oval Sacred Precinct. The Peristyle Hall was constructed with elements that reflect this magic number: There are thirty-two pillars (4 × 8) in the Peristyle Hall and sixty-four (8 × 8) false windows built into the interior walls (Albright 1958: 269–286).[73] This means that the eight pillars probably functioned like a foundation stone for the Awām.

The principles of orientation, arrangement, and measurement as well as axiality and centricity were essential to the construction of the temple as a sacred space.[74] Astrological orientation allowed the sun to light the Peristyle Hall and the temple's interior on auspicious occasions. The temple's orientation with the Polar Star

house and the blood sprinkled on the doorway (Dalman 1928 I: 30–32, 1928 II: 445 f.). These inauguration rites were to protect the house and its residents against evil. On building sacrifices, cf. Smith 1927: 376, 632 f. On the slaughter of an animal on the threshold as a tribal custom in Yemen, see Weir 2007: 174, 177.

67 What kind of image or symbol of Aranyadaʿ this might have been is presently difficult to discern. However, this ritual practice might have been performed in the temple at Ṣirwāḥ, cf. Röring 2007: 164. The custom is well known in ancient Mesopotamia, cf. Palmer 2012: 307.

68 Ch. Robin (2012: 43 f.) refers to the return of images of the deity, like the Assyrian deportation of the Arabian deities of Adumatu.

69 Caubet & Gajda 2003: 1219–1242.

70 Glanzman 1999: 187–201; Zaid & Maraqten 2008: 227–240; on the axial orientation of temples, see Wightman 2007: 960–972.

71 This text has been discovered in al-Ḥuqqa, north of Ṣanʿāʾ, Müller 1972: 104–111, see also Nebes 2011: 374.

72 The temples of Ḥaḍramawt usually have four pillars, see Sedov 2005: 41.

73 On the Peristyle Hall, see Zaid & Maraqten 2008: 227–240.

74 On this concept in the ancient Near East, see Lundquist 1983: 210 f., see also Wightman 2007: 960–972.



Fig. 10. False windows, interior west façade of the Peristyle Hall (AFSM archive).

accentuated its position on the *axis mundi*.[75] In the afternoon, when temple rituals might have been carried out, the Oval Sanctuary Precinct was in shadow.

Exterior and interior decoration of the Awām temple
Awām temple imagery was very impressive. Votive offerings, inscribed plinths, sculpture and painting referred to the Awām imagery. These objects that were fixed in a position within the architectural context and were intended to be watched and acknowledged in relation to its architectural framework. Many aspects of the temple's construction were meant to impress the visitor and fill him or her with a sense of awe in the presence of the god: The enormous and magnificently-dressed stones that made up the oval wall, the beautiful ornamental freezes on the wall's exterior, and the finely-carved inscriptions around the top of the wall emphasized by red paint. Bull statues were attached to the oval wall and flanked the Northwest Gate. Two bronze bulls erected on pedestals flanked the entrance of the ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate (Figs. 14, 16) and two bronze horses on pedestals flanked the entrance passage in area A.
During excavation, niches, false windows (Fig. 10), large statues of human figures, oxen and horses made of bronze, and limestone and alabaster friezes were discovered as well as other building adornments. The surfaces of the inscribed blocks were painted red and the plastered walls of Building I and the Annex were painted with geometric patterns and human figures.
One of the architectural techniques used to delineate sacred space is the inscribed alabaster panels attached to the interior wall of the Peristyle Hall, primarily beneath the false windows.[76] In addition, dozens of inscribed bronze plaques were nailed to the wall of the Annex and the Peristyle Hall. Some of these were discovered *in situ* (MB 2005 I-15). Moreover, many symbols, such as the symbol of Almaqah, and reliefs of ibexes (Fig. 14), antelopes, etc. were discovered carved into the walls.

Access to the Awām temple: The layout of cultic areas and ritual organization

"The door is the boundary between the foreign and the domestic worlds in the case of the ordinary dwelling, between the profane and the sacred worlds in the case of the temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world" (van Gennep 1960: 20).

Approaches to the Awām temple complex
The access routes and layout of the Awām temple include the eight-pillared propylaeum, courtyards, rooms and ritual spaces and several features such as basins for ablutions, rituals, cults, and the cult of the dead (Fig. 21).
There were clearly transitional areas the worshipper had to pass through while moving from the outside (profane) space to the interior (divine) space. Access to the temple complex was governed and controlled by gates and doors leading to a hierarchical series of courtyards and halls, and these served as transitional areas. During the long history of the temple, gates or doors were blocked or changed and new entrances established. It seems the temenos of the Awām was approached during the whole history of the

[75] Arabic classical sources mention the correlation between the Kaʿba and the Polestar, considered being the center of heaven (Akkach 2005: 181–185).

[76] None was found *in situ*, but small holes in the nearby walls point to their original locations. Some fragmentary pieces have been discovered reused in walls or pavements.

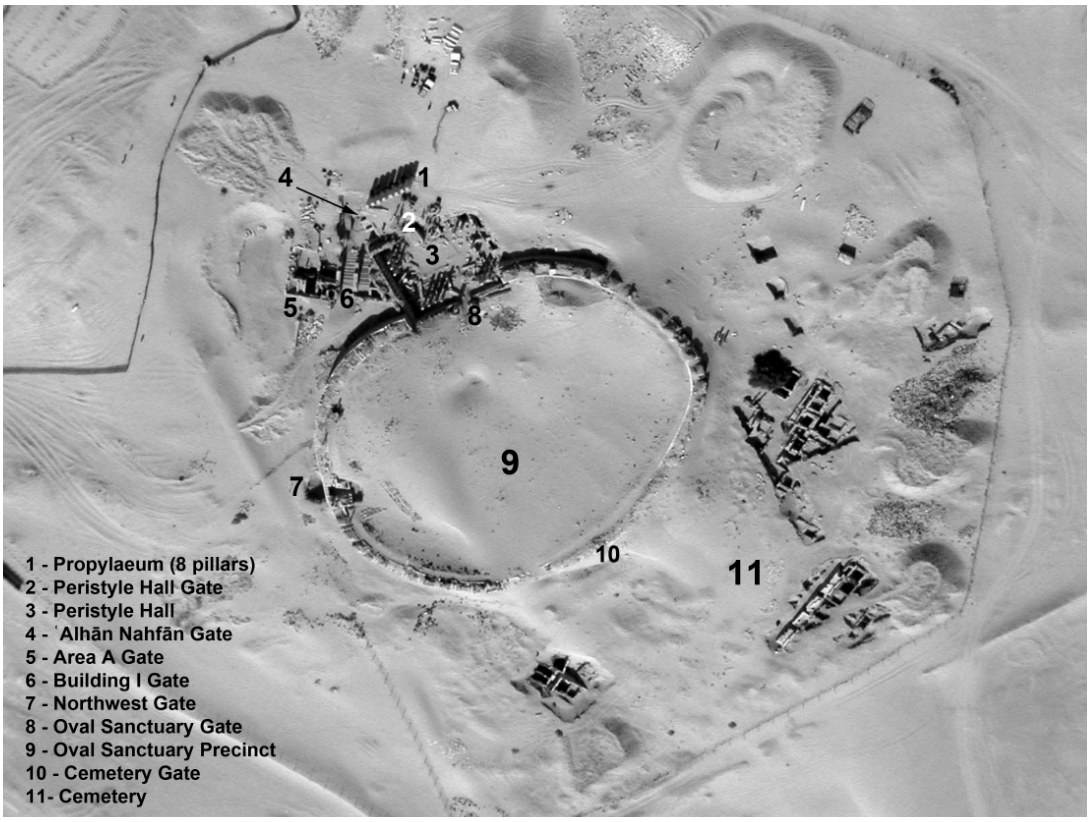


Fig. 11. Awām Complex: Aerial photograph taken in 2004 (AFSM archive).

temple from the north-west side of the temple complex, i.e. from the direction of the city of Ma'rib via the processional road of Awām (*ms¹b' 'wm*).

In about the middle of the first millennium BCE, the Awām complex consisted of four main zones: the Annex, the Peristyle Hall, the Oval Sanctuary Precinct and the cemetery (Figs. 5, 11). There were several doors, and gates from one room to another, namely from the Annex to the Peristyle Hall and then to the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. Apparently, the cemetery was entered only via the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. Three entrances for the inside Oval Sanctuary Precinct have been discovered. The main entrance was the main Gate of the Peristyle Hall. Apparently, the Cemetery Gate [77] and the Northwest Gate (Figs. 6, 11, 12) were made specifically for priests. The latter gate was narrowed towards the end of the 5th century BCE (Ja 552, Ja 553). Possibly the Northwest Gate had the name *qs¹dm* mentioned in Ja 567/8.

There were degrees of holiness, and not all parts of the Awām complex were considered to be equally holy. Usually, sacred places mark the route from an impure space to a pure space with an intermediate space for rites of purification. This can be seen in the Awām in the approach from the north-west side of the temple (see below).

Four main courtyards can be distinguished in the Awām complex — in Area A, in the Annex, and in the Peristyle Hall, which was partly roofed (Albright 1958: 269–286; Zaid & Maraqten 2008: 227–240). Large bronze statues of bulls such as on the Northwest Gate (Fig. 12)

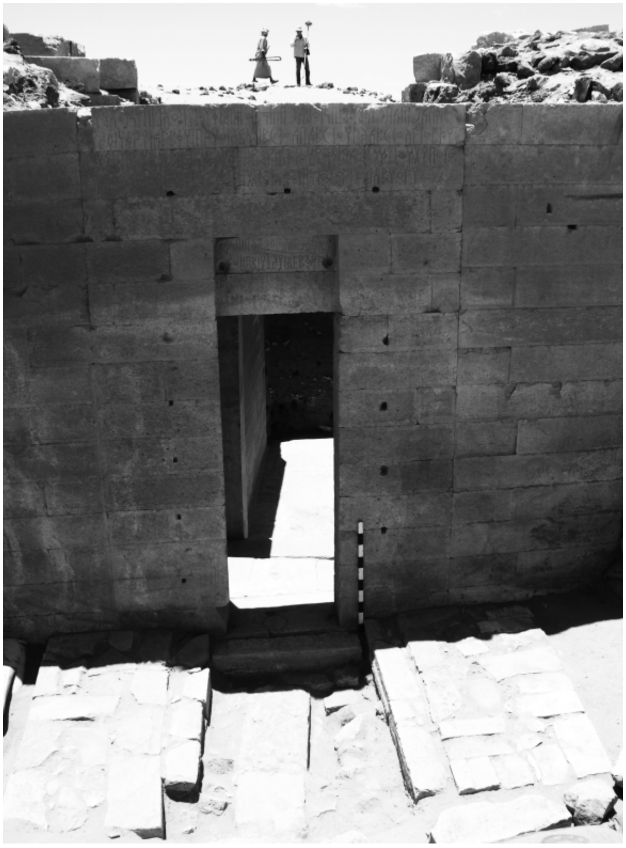


Fig. 12. Awām Complex: Northwest Gate (Photograph: AFSM archive).

[77] Unfortunately, only the upper part is visible.

and the ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate guarded entrances to the Awām complex. Two bulls guarding the Northwest Gate (Ja 567/8) and ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate are recorded in an inscription in two copies (MB 2004 I-69, MB 2004 I-180, Figs. 14, 16). Traces of the feet of the statues can still be seen.

Approach to Area A

As previously mentioned, access to the Awām complex was governed and controlled by gates leading to a hierarchy of courtyards. Apparently the main pathway for worshippers from the beginning of the 1st century CE to the end of the 4th century CE was from the west side of the temple, via the passage in Area A (Fig. 6). This was also the route of the pilgrims who might have performed some ritual in the Ḥarūnum temple, and then took the Awām processional road to the Awām temple. These worshippers would have congregated in a big open courtyard in front of the Northwest Gate. [78]

In the 3rd-4th centuries CE, entry to the temple was via a small pathway (Area A Gate, Fig. 6), close to Building I on the west side. Visitors would approach an open courtyard via this small gate. The first stage was the performance of some rituals in the courtyard. Adjacent to this door a proscription against animals such as camels, donkeys, mules, etc., entering the temple was posted (MB 2000 I-7, Maraqten 2006: 53).

From the 1st to the end of the 4th century CE, visitors could enter the temple only via the Building I Gate (Fig. 13) giving access from the south side to the Building I complex. This Building seems to have been an administrative structure since most of the temple proscriptions and temple laws are engraved on its façade.

The Building I Gate led to a passage with a double staircase possibly constructed in the 1st century CE (Glanzman 2002: 187–201). Two pedestals with friezes and a double inscription by the ʿAmdān Bayin Yuhaqbiḍ, decorated the interior of the main staircase. The inscription mentions the dedication of a horse statue to Almaqah (MB 2001 I-102, MB 2002 I-7, Figs. 13–14). The Area A Gate and Building I Gate had locking devices, so apparently they could be closed if necessary (Fig. 13). After approaching the staircase passage, on the left hand there is a part of Building I that can be described as an Entrance Hall (Fig. 15). It was partially roofed and has benches, and seems to have functioned as a reception hall for official visitors such as kings.



Fig. 13. Awām Complex: Area A, Building I – Gate, staircase passage (AFSM archive).



Fig. 14. Inscription of ʿAmdān Bayin Yuhaqbiḍ (MB 2001 I-102) and the ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate (AFSM archive).



Fig. 15. Awām Complex: Area A – Entrance Hall (AFSM archive).

Approaching the Annex

This is the first zone for entering the temple complex (Figs. 17–18). It consists of a rectangular structure built parallel to the eight pillars north-east of the Peristyle Hall. The earliest and main entrance was the propylaeum of eight pillars. This route might have been closed off in the 5th century BCE when people started to use a gate which was later repaired (the ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate) leading to the Annex from the west side. It encompassed several small rooms, had a table for banquets and a room for washing (Fig. 17).

Visitors could enter the Annex via the ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate (Figs. 14, 16). This is the West Gate of the Annex and seems to have been constructed by the 4th century BCE and continued to be in use until the middle of the

[78] The existence of this courtyard, the processional road and several buildings belonging to the road, have been partially confirmed by ground-penetrating radar.



Fig. 16. Awām Complex: ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate: Two large bull statues once stood on the flanking podia (AFSM archive).



Fig. 17. Awām Complex: Annex entrances (AFSM archive).

3rd century CE. We named it thus because ʿAlhān Nahfān (MB 2004 I-69, MB 2004 I-180),[79] about the beginning of the 2nd century CE, added the two buttresses and dedicated two bull statues. This dedication was inscribed in duplicate on two alabaster panels. The small doorway in the east side of the Annex seems to have been restricted to priests and temple personnel rather than made accessible for the general public.

Approaching the Peristyle Hall

The Peristyle Hall represents an entryway to the Oval Sanctuary Precinct and is located north-east of it. Before approaching the Peristyle Hall, visitors were obliged to go through the Annex and then via a gate with three entrances, into the Peristyle Hall (Figs. 6, 11, 17–18). This entrance was the formal passage arranged symmetrically to the axis of the movement of visitors. This gate could be closed if necessary. The monumental Peristyle Hall was constructed toward the end of the 6th century BCE and the Annex a little later (Zaid & Maraqten 2008: 227–240).

[79] The Sabaic king ʿAlhān Nahfān reigned ca. 195–210 CE.

This area was an open courtyard already in existence in the beginning of the 7th century BCE as documented by a recently discovered inscription *in situ* (MB 2005 I-138). [80]



Fig. 18. Awām Complex: Peristyle Hall – West Side (AFSM archive).

Approaching the Oval Sanctuary Precinct

The Oval Sanctuary Precinct was an enclosure open to the sky and contained several structures, courtyards, and a wellspring (MB 2006 I-9). It is the main structure of the Awām temple and the most holy space; most rituals were performed there. It was virtually, "the house of Almaqah" (*byt ʾlmqh*). This magnificent structure, worthy of its sobriquet, was stately enough to embody the supernatural hosts of the Sabaeans. The outer perimeter of the wall of the enclosure is 282.61 m and the Sanctuary Precinct encompassed an area of 5,107 m² (Glanzman 1999: 76). The height of the oval wall was ca. 12 m. It is difficult to assess the real extent of this most sacred area within the enclosure since it is still mostly unexcavated. [81]



Fig. 19. Awām Complex: Oval Sanctuary Gate (AFSM archive).

It was possible to enter the Oval Sanctuary Precinct via three main portals (Figs. 6, 11). For visitors coming from the north side the Peristyle Hall, the main gate of the Oval Sanctuary Precinct was available. The Northwest Gate was specifically for priests and the Cemetery Gate was restricted for funerary rites.

The Main Gate and threshold of the Oval Sanctuary Precinct were set aside for the ritual of purification. Crossing this threshold was the key ceremony for visitors and was only achieved after ritual ablution, using a bronze basin affixed to the threshold (Fig. 20). [82] The purification ritual undertaken while passing through the sacred spaces of the Awām complex — the Annex, Peristyle Hall and then the threshold —, could be considered in the context of the work *The Rite of the Passage* by Arnold van Gennep. [83]



Fig. 20. Awām Complex: Threshold of the Oval Sanctuary Gate and ablution area (AFSM archive).

The Awām temple as a place of ritual purification

The existence of ablution water basins and the purity prescriptions in degree regarding entry to the Awām temple demonstrates a careful attitude among the Sabaeans toward the purity of the temple. Sacred and impure are polar opposites: Ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) is the foundation of the ritual of Almaqah upon which the performance of other rituals depended. This notion is common in ancient Near Eastern temples (Lundquist 1983: 212–215) and belongs to the common Semitic conception of ritual purity. As a place of communication with the divinity, the Awām temple is typically a place of purity, because purity (*ṭahāra*) is requisite before coming in contact with the god Almaqah. No one was allowed to enter the temple without first being purified (*ġyr ṭhr*, *ʾl ẓy*). Ritual washings (*rḥḍ*), sometimes multiple ablutions, were necessary for visitors. One who entered the sacred areas of the temple

[80] This inscription engraved on a stone platform has been discovered in the Annex; it mentions Yadaʿʾīl Ḏarīḥ (Zaid & Maraqten 2008: 227–240).

[81] Ground-penetrating radar investigations (Moorman *et al.* 2001: 179–187; Jones & Maki 2006) and inscriptions have also provided some information (MB 2006 I-9); see also Ibrahim 2006: 199–216.

[82] The dedicatory inscription Ja 831 cast on this basin is a general offering formula and does not give information about rituals.

[83] The ritual of transition from outside to inside the Awām complex seems to illustrate Turner's concept of liminality, of crossing the threshold (Turner 1991: 94–108). The significance of the threshold as a sacred space is well known in many cultures (Eliade 1987: 24 f.; Ambos 2009: 332–333), see also note 59.

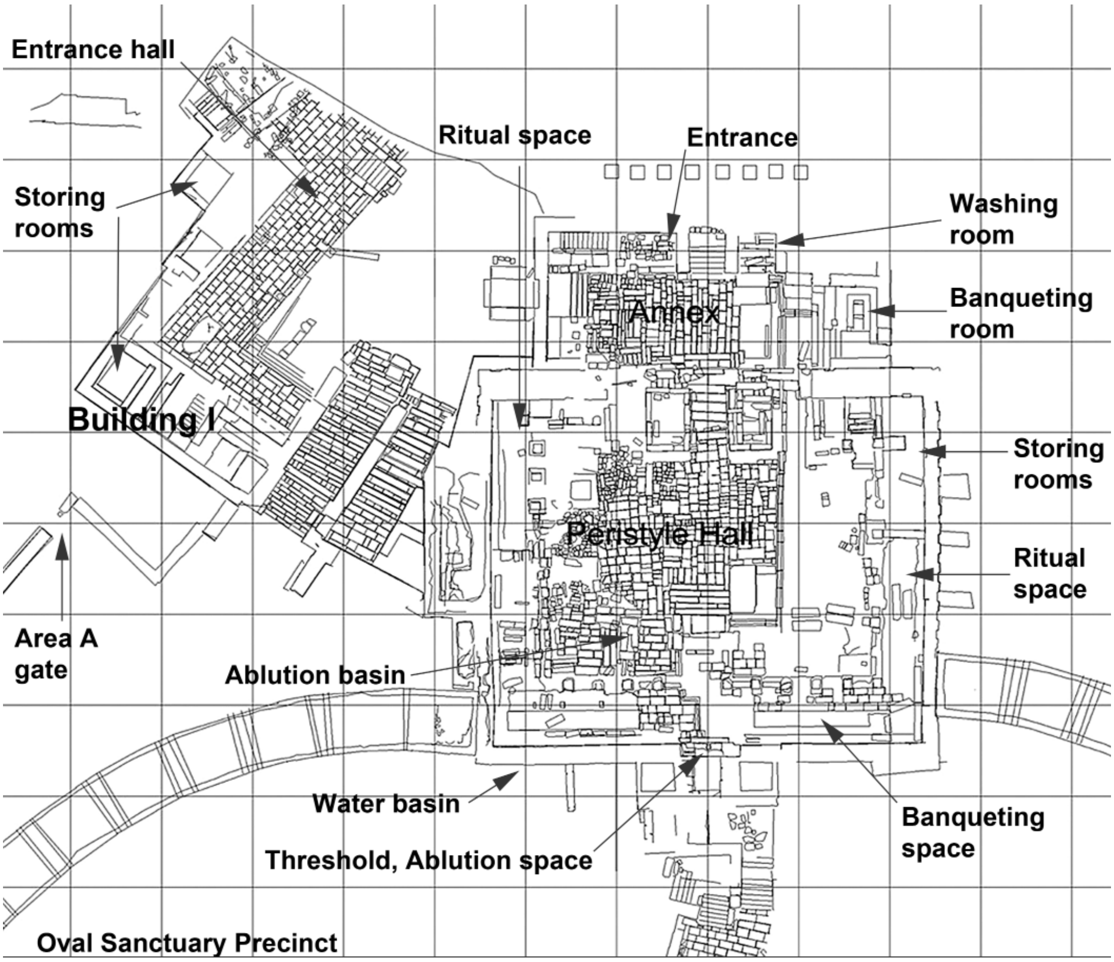


Fig. 21. Awām Complex. Detailed map of the Peristyle Hall, Building I and adjacent structures including ritual places and ablution areas (AFSM archive).

complex must be clean both physically and spiritually.[84] Several texts on this subject mention that those who did not fulfil their promises to Almaqah or make sin offerings subsequently became ill (i.e. Ja 720). Others expressed their fear of the wrath of Almaqah because they did not do as he obliged and tried to placate him with offerings. We have good data about ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) from the penitential inscriptions and furthermore, eight recently discovered temple laws at the Awām deal with this subject (i.e. MB 1998 I-10, MB 2002 I-28, MB 2005 I-88).

The majority of South Arabian temples had courtyards that contained either a spring or a well or, at the very least, basins of water for ablutions; see for example the Barʾān temple (Vogt *et al.* 2000). At the Awām temple, there are three places for purification and performing ablutions before entering the specific sacred spaces of the temple, namely the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. The first one is in the Annex where there seems to be a room restricted for washing, possibly "ritual washing" (*iġtisāl* or *ġusl*, Fig. 21). The second one is inside the Peristyle Hall, represented by a bronze basin.[85] The third one is a bronze basin fixed to the threshold of the entrance from the Peristyle Hall to the Oval Sanctuary Precinct (Figs. 19–21). The latter was the central place for ablution (see above). Several penitential texts attest that anyone entering the temple without ritual purification would be punished and made to pay compensation (Ryckmans 1972: 1–15).

Although the texts do not provide specific information about the act of purification, the three washing places might have been three transition phases accompanied by specific prayers. The movement through different ritual spaces of the Awām could be considered rites of passage. The anthropologist A. van Gennep suggests for human rituals, which he describes as rites of passage, that there are three successive but separate stages: rites of separation, threshold or transformation rites (*rites de marge*), and rites of incorporation.[86]

During the first stage, the person or persons first withdraw from one place or status in preparation for entering another. Rites of separation distinct a person from his past state or status. A

[84] Unfortunately, Sabaean inscriptions do not give us details about the *rḥḍ*-ritual, "ritual ablution" or "washing of the body".

[85] This was discovered during the AFSM excavations of 1951–1952.

[86] A. van Gennep (1960) made some observations about rites for building and sanctifying a house and calendar rites.

good example of this phase in regard to the Awām temple is the ritual purification through cleansing of the body.[87] To this stage also belongs the donning of clean clothes.

The second stage, the threshold or *limen*, describes rituals of passing from one stage of life to another. Liminality means being on a threshold, betwixt and between, passing into a new ritual life over a threshold or entryway (Turner 1991: 94–108). The sanctified threshold of the main entrance gate of the Oval Sanctuary Precinct marked not only a major ritual of purification, but also symbolized the assumption of a new status, namely approaching the dwelling of Almaqah (*byt ʾlmqh*).[88]

The third stage is very significant and can be seen in the ritual banquet that was part of pilgrimage rituals at the Awām. Banquet benches have been discovered in the Annex and the Peristyle Hall.[89] Rites of incorporation can also be seen in the ritual meal. This ceremony relates to the unification of social and religious groups in the Sabaean kingdom, especially in the early period (Ryckmans 1973: 36–39).

One of the temple proscriptions concerning purity was discovered during the 2005 AFSM season together with two other temple proscriptions (Fig. 22); it is engraved on a wall on the opposite side of the ʿAlhān Nahfan Gate (MB 2005 I-88).



Fig. 22. Inscription MB 2005 I-88: Temple prescription (AFSM archive).

Transcription of MB 2005 I-88:

1 *bnm / ʾlwhb / ḏʿbrn / lyḥḏrn / wl*
2 *ynḏrn / ḏys*^{3}*fn / ʾṯtm / bmḥrmn / wḏyb=*
3 *hʾn / mḥrmn / wʾl / ẓy / wḏybhʾn / lḫbz / q=*
4 *dfn / wʾl / ẓy / wʾl / trḥḍ / wʾlmqh / fhẓm*
5 *lʿbdhw / ʾlwhb*

Translation:

1 From ʾĪlwahab of the family Dhū-ʿAbrān: let him beware of [his crime] and
2 let him perform an expiation: whoever would have a sexual intercourse with a woman inside the temple and
3 whoever enters the temple impure (without being ritually purified) and whoever enters (the temple) to get water in a jar while he is
4 impure (without being ritually purified) and he did not have the ritual washing. And Almaqahū granted
5 protection for His worshiper ʾĪlwahab.

Commentary:

The text is directed to the public or worshippers and not to a specific person. ʾĪlwahab of the family Dhū-ʿAbrān seems to have been one of the priests or administrators of the Awām temple.

Although the style of this text is similar to the style of the penitential inscription, it is considered to be a temple prescription since the ritual rules mentioned are for common people and visitors: It does not mention that ʾĪlwahab of the family Dhū-ʿAbrān should confess to a sin that he might have committed.

The noun *qdfn*, attested here for the first time in ancient South Arabian inscriptions, might relate to the Arabic *al-qadf*, "taking water from the basin", or "scooping out and pouring and taking water from the basin"; *al-qadf* means "pouring; scooping out" (*Lisān al-ʿArab*: *qdf*).

Offering and sacrifice

Usually the temenos was open to any person who wanted to sacrifice or visit the temple, if the person was ritually pure. The most-attested offerings that visitors or pilgrims dedicated to Almaqah were statuettes of humans and animals — bulls, horses or antelopes, incense burners, and inscribed plaques. These offerings were made primarily of bronze, limestone and alabaster (Sima 2000). This is evident by the remains of hundreds of inscribed bases or pedestals.[90] Incense offering is also attested (*CIH* 582 bis/2, Ryckmans 1993: 370). There is little evidence for anthropomorphic images of deities in general (Arbach 2013: 461–471; Robin 2012: 51, 68–72) and there is no accurate evidence at all for images of Almaqah from the Awām temple. Recently, however, an image of Almaqah engraved in relief has been found at as-Sawdāʾ (Arbach 2013: 461–471).

Animal sacrifices are also well-attested (Ryckmans 1993: 365–369; Maraqten 1994: 160–177). The main slaughter altar (*mḏbḥt*) seems to have been located in an open courtyard on the west side of the Northwest Gate, where huge quantities of animal bones and ash layers have been found. Slaughter altars and incense burners have also been discovered. Apparently, another small slaughter altar exists in the north-west corner of the Peristyle Hall (Fig. 18).The Awām construction is laden with the accessories required for sacrifice and other cultic activities; there are altars and sources of water, drainage

[87] See the Sabaic verb *ġts*^{1}*l*, "wash oneself" (Beeston *et al.* 1982: 54), which corresponds to Arabic *ġusl,* or *iġtiṣāl*, "the major ritual ablution, the washing of the whole body".

[88] On the significance of liminality, its place in rituals and society and its variations, see Turner 1991: 94–108.

[89] Banquet benches have been also found in Barʾān temple and the temple of Awʿāl Ṣirwāḥ (Gerlach & Schnelle 2013: 218 f.). A ritual meal was prepared for the god ʿAthtar in connection with the making of contracts at Jabal al-Lawdh, in the Jawf (Ryckmans 1973: 36–39; Robin & Breton 1982: 590–629).

[90] For background to the cult in ancient Yemen, see Ryckmans 1993: 355–380 and Müller 2002: 175–194. On rituals performed in the temples of Ḥaḍramawt, see Sedov 2005: 63–69.

systems and cooking areas. There is no evidence for the burnt offering in ancient South Arabia.[91]

The principle of sacrifice is the essence of sacred space. Much of temple ritual revolved around the altar, the principle and practice of sacrifice, primarily the sacrifice of living animals, though incense, grains, libation, and other materials were used. No concrete data on the technical details of sacrificial performance, the attitude of the Sabaeans towards sacrifice or the frequency of its occurrence at the Awām temple is yet available.

Offerings were made voluntarily or commanded by the deity's oracle (*ḥgn k-wqh b-ms¹'l-hw,* e.g. Ja 568/4). Cultic objects, ritual deposits and representations of sacred activity also constituted religious practice. Altars, offerings, animal sacrifices and votive objects such as statuettes and cultic utensils were considered as holy. Everything inside the *temenos* belonged to the divinity; offerings became its property and it protected them against damage or theft by evildoers. Miscreants would be cursed;[92] to steal a votive gift was a punishable violation (*CIH* 30, *CIH* 398/11–12, MB 2002 I-28)[93] and if it occurred, the violators were forced to offer compensation or offerings on the donors' behalf (al-Jawf 04.18 + 04.19 A).

If space within the temenos became full due to the amount of votive gifts, statuettes and other objects donated, they were piled up, hidden inside the temenos or reused in walls and pavements. Metal artefacts seem to have been melted down and possibly recast as ritual vessels for use in the sanctuary. Such objects were discovered in the Peristyle Hall and the Annex during excavation. This shows why cultic objects or inscribed objects from the early Sabaic period were found at the Awām temple.

Cult of the dead

The Awām temple, considered as a cosmic axis, had the function of linking the realms of the dead. This is evidenced by the Awām cemetery being attached to the temple complex. The designation of the Awām cemetery as *mḥrm gnztn* "cemetery sacred enclave" (Ja 702/10) attests to the sacrosanct nature of this cemetery.

We have no textual data about the ritual ceremonies for the dead that seem to have taken place at the Awām temple. Apparently, the dead person was taken, after a kind of ritual in the Oval Sanctuary Precinct, through the Cemetery Gate (Fig. 23) and buried in the cemetery. Further ceremonies took place in the cemetery.[94] The name of the dead person was inscribed on a label and attached to the body. Dozens of ostraca with the name of the dead have been discovered in the excavations of the German Archaeological Institute in the cemetery. Further, in ancient South Arabia, a custom existed of preserving the memory of the dead by putting images of them on their tombs, frequently with an inscription recording his or her name. Good examples of this have been discovered at the Awām cemetery (Gerlach 2002: 41–91).



Fig. 23: Awām Complex: Upper part of the Cemetery Gate (AFSM archive).

Conclusions

Scholars of South Arabian cultures have long noted the significance of the Awām temple as a key centre for religious power in ancient South Arabia. Apart from Egyptian temples, the Awām temple is possibly the best-preserved monumental temple from the first millennium BCE in ancient Near East. In this study, we have used the results of the recent archaeological and epigraphic discoveries of the AFSM excavations at Awām during the last ten years' excavations to show how the Awām fits into the common ideology and typology of ancient Near Eastern temples.

This study proves that the Awām temple was not only a sacred space *par excellence*, but also that it was the most important socio-religious economic institution in the kingdom of Saba'. The requirements for ritual purity adequate to enter the Oval Sanctuary Precinct were found to be stricter in the Awām than in any other South-Arabian temple. Thanks to the discovery of these new inscriptions, the Awām temple has proven to be one of the best examples for studying the cults and daily rituals of the temple in ancient Yemen.

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91 Found at the Almaqah temple in Ṣirwāḥ (Röring 2007: 85 f.).

92 On curses in ancient South Arabian inscriptions: Maraqten 1998: 189–200.

93 Maraqten 2006: 227–240. It was forbidden to remove any silver from the property of Almaqah, Lord of Bar'ān (*CIH* 400), see also Multhoff & Stein 2008: 1–44.

94 The possible occurrence of such ritual ceremonies may be seen in tomb 29. Cf. Röring 2005: 153–159.

Sigla

CSAI Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions: http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it.

ER Jones (ed.) 2005.

Ja Sabaean inscriptions published in Jamme 1962.

Lisān al-ʿArab see Ibn Manẓur.

MB Registration siglum of inscriptions discovered by the American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM) excavations at Maḥram Bilqīs (1998–2006).

For further Abbreviations, sigla, and bibliography of cited inscriptions see Kitchen 2000 and CSAI.

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